I tried to hide myself, I tuck myself away (and you both grab hold, saying "no you don't")

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I tried to hide myself, I tuck myself away (and you both grab hold, saying "no you don't")

by puppyboy_butch

Summary

The first time Jemma notices it– *really* notices it, not just has it set off some sort of unidentified warning chime in the back of her brain, like it did back when they were on the Bus all those years ago– is when they've been living together for a month and a half.

She already knew, of course, although it was really only from a medical standpoint. It's certainly not like they ever discussed it. It existed purely as a hypothetical in her mind, nothing more than a fact she knows about her, something important to note about her medical history.

Daisy has an aversion to needles, is allergic to adhesives and some prescription painkillers, and was almost certainly abused as a child.

OR

Six times FitzSimmons realize that Daisy's childhood really, really sucked, plus one time she tells them about it.

Notes

Daisy's ambiguously but canonically awful childhood you are so loved by me ❤

And as always please for the love of God do not ask me what's going on on the SHIELD side of things. Nobody knows. Least of all me.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1: she has nightmares

Chapter Notes

> Max puppyboy--butch here, back with another installment of "Jemma Simmons and her brotherhusbands." Quick somebody play I Want My Boyfriends to Kiss by Ashnikko.
>
> This fic is complete (or almost. Starts pantomiming choking myself out.), but I'm posting it in chapters because it got. *Really* long LMAO. Like longer than the previous installment by several thousand words long. One of the first notes I wrote for it was "A couple thousand words at MAXIMUM, Max. Do NOT get carried away."
>
> Well I got carried away! Sue me!!
>
> Chapter specific trigger warnings
>
> -Unaddressed PTSD from the POV character. And the subject character. And the character that's asleep in the other room the entire time. And th
> -Nightmares
> -Dissociation
> -Unintentional minor self injury
> -Heavily implied child abuse. It's literally the entire plot LMAO

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first time Jemma notices it– *really* notices it, not just has it set off some sort of unidentified warning chime in the back of her brain, like it did back when they were on the Bus all those years ago– is when they've been living together for a month and a half.

She already knew, of course, although it was really only from a medical standpoint. She's the team's doctor after all (no matter how many times she's tried to remind them that she is a Ph.D., *not* an M.D. It's not as though they ever make *Fitz* do it, and he has almost as many doctorates as she does), and that means that, more often than not, she's the one that ends up patching up their injuries.

She's seen the scars on her back and sides, years old and impossible to self inflict. She's looked at her x-rays, mapped the near countless breaks all over her body, some of which healed incorrectly so long ago that it's just her normal. She knows what it all means.

She never really *thought* about it, though, not really. It's certainly not like they ever discussed it. It existed purely as a hypothetical in her mind, nothing more than a fact she knows about her, something important to note about her medical history.

Daisy has an aversion to needles, is allergic to adhesives and some prescription painkillers, and was almost certainly abused as a child.

Up until recently, it existed to her solely in clinical terms. Daisy has never talked about it, at least not to her, and she's never *really* noticed anything too alarming before now, so Jemma never put much thought into it. It just– *is.*

It's not like how it is with Fitz. He doesn't talk about it either– of course she gets the two of the most emotionally stunted people in the world for her best friends– but his childhood, unacknowledged and unaddressed as it may be, is a wound that's impossible for her to overlook.

He doesn't talk about it, aside from the first time she met his mum, and he quietly told her on the drive there to *please don't ask about my father, at least not in front of ma,* but she sees it in the way he avoids eye contact, his self deprecation, his barely hidden need for approval.

In contrast, Daisy is…

Fine, actually.

To the point that Jemma would actually *forget* sometimes, right up until she'd inevitably end up having to set a bone, or stitch up a wound, or check for a concussion yet *again* (their resident Inhuman is a bit of a frequent flier in the med bay. She pulled a bloodstained punch card out from the pocket of her even bloodier tactical suit one time. Jemma would find her dedication to the bit almost admirable, if she didn't find it aggravating first). She'd go to do her job, only to catch sight of all the injuries Daisy accumulated years before they even met, and it'd all come crashing back down on her.

But that's about the extent of her knowledge on it. For a long time, at least.

The first thing Jemma notices– *really notices,* after almost half a decade of doing the exact opposite– are the nightmares.

It's not like she's never noticed Daisy's odd sleep schedule before, but Jemma tries not to make a habit of throwing stones in glass houses.

She semi-regularly pulls all nighters, so she really doesn't have a leg to stand on when it comes to how much sleep someone else is getting.

Besides, *no one* in their line of work sleeps well. It's one of the first things new recruits were trained on in all three branches of the academy, after all, back when they still had an academy: how to function on little to no sleep. So, if you ask her, it's more than understandable that Jemma thinks nothing of how little Daisy sleeps.

Initially.

It gets a lot harder to overlook when she's living in Jemma's apartment, sleeping on Jemma's couch.

(it's hard to overlook *before,* in retrospect. Their rooms were next to each other back on the Bus. Jemma can't count the number of times she woke up in the middle of the night, half convinced she could hear someone crying.)

Still, even with her staying just down the hall, rather than several rooms and soundproofed brick walls away, it's a month and a half before Jemma *really* notices it.

It's the middle of the night when it happens, and she can't sleep. She's been trying for hours now, but nothing's worked. She's not even *tired.* She's painfully alert, and feels the inexplicable urge to get ready. For *what,* she's not exactly sure.

Jemma sits up with a frustrated huff, throwing the blankets back. Fitz grumbles in his sleep, but he settles back down as soon as she brushes a hand against his face. She slips out of bed as gently as she can once he does, tucks her shiv into her pocket, and grabs her laptop from her work bag; if she can't sleep, then she might as well get some work done.

There are nightlights in every room (she doesn't exactly do very well in the dark, not like she used to), so she thankfully manages to circumvent any stubbed toes that might otherwise be unavoidable as she makes a beeline for the kitchen table. She sets up shop once she reaches it, then pauses when she turns to face the living room.

Daisy is asleep on the couch, her legs tangled in her blanket, her face buried in the pillow her arms are wrapped around. Jemma softens, smiling at the sight. She may or may not take a picture. That's for her to know, and for Daisy– who has both the desire and the preternatural ability to spot and dodge cameras– to hopefully never find out about.

She can't say how long she works for after she finally sits down and starts. Just that her eyes are burning from staring at the screen, and that the moonlight is shining through the living room window at a noticeably different angle when she finally looks back up.

Jemma leans back in her chair, stretching her arms over her head and stifling a yawn. It's (…probably) been a few hours now, but she isn't ready to try falling asleep again just quite yet. She doesn't know what it is, but she still feels too– *on,* for lack of a better word, to lie back down.

She brings her hands back down to the keyboard, ready to keep working, but stills when she hears a noise. She almost heads back to her bedroom to check on Fitz– nightmares are far from an uncommon occurrence for him as of late– before she realizes that there's no way she would be able to hear him from where she currently is.

Daisy is still fast asleep when she looks, but she's started to curl in on herself, her face pressed even further into her pillow. She shifts after a moment, and the upper half of it becomes visible; her brows are furrowed, her eyes squeezed shut, tighter than they would be if she were just sleeping peacefully.

She whimpers quietly, her arms tightening around her pillow, and Jemma slowly rises from her chair.

"Daisy," she says quietly. She steps towards the couch, though she doesn't try to shake her awake or calm her down like she would with Fitz. She's never helped Daisy with a nightmare before, and she absolutely knows better than to try to wake a post traumatic stress riddled soldier from what's likely to be a nightmare. She *likes* not being thrown through walls, thank you very much.

Oh, God, she really hopes Daisy isn't one of those people that sleeps with a weapon underneath their pillow.

(…Jemma staunchly refuses to acknowledge the hypocrisy there.)

"*Daisy,*" she repeats, slightly louder. The Inhuman is still making noises, and it's slowly morphing into words as the seconds pass. She's curled almost completely into a ball by now, with her knees up against her chest and her arms over her head.

"Oh, hell," Jemma swears, and hurriedly kneels next to the couch. Her hand hovers over Daisy's bicep, but she doesn't make contact. "It's okay, love, everything's okay."

It's not as though she's inexperienced in dealing with nightmares. Far from it. She's had them for years now, and Fitz's have been especially bad lately, for obvious reasons, so she knows how to help someone with a night terror better than (she imagines) most people do.

But again, she's never helped *Daisy*. For all she knows, the things that help Fitz– physical touch, verbal encouragement, waking him up– will just set her off even further.

"*No, no, no, no, no,*" she's whining now, and Jemma feels her heart leap into her throat.

"You're okay," she tells her, because what else is she meant to say? "You're okay, it's just a nightmare."

Daisy lets out a quiet sob, her arms tightening over her head. Jemma can hear her breath hitching, and realizes with no small amount of horror that she's started to cry in her sleep.

She's seen Daisy cry before, of course. From grief, and despair, and pain, and exhaustion, and relief, and laughter, and joy, and a million other things.

Never like this, though. Never from *fear*.

Daisy makes another barely there noise as Jemma tries to think, her hands curling into fists against her skull. Her leg jerks once, like she'd kicked something in her dream, before snapping back against her torso. She's crying in earnest now. Jemma feels sick.

She doesn't know what to do. What is she supposed to–

"*I'll be good!*" Daisy sobs abruptly, shooting upright out of nowhere, and Jemma nearly jumps out of her skin in surprise. She falls backward, just barely avoiding getting hit in the face. "I'm *sorry,* I'm sorry, please don't– I'll be *good*– I'll…"

Her voice peters out into a whine, and she stares at nothing with wide eyes, her face wet. Her chest is heaving with how hard she's breathing, her hands curling into fists around her blanket. After a moment her mouth slowly closes, and she blinks twice. Her gaze darts around the room for a few seconds, before it lands on Jemma.

"…Jemma?" She says absently, her eyes slightly glassy. "Did I… wake you up?"

"Did you–" Jemma starts incredulously, pushing herself back up into a kneel. "Are you *okay?*"

Daisy blinks again, before her eyebrows draw together.

"Am I… okay?" She asks, then frowns. "I'm… yeah?"

Jemma almost laughs. The claim would be a bit more believable if tears weren't still actively trailing down her face, and she weren't looking through her with a thousand yard stare.

"Are you asking me or telling?"

Daisy nods, then proceeds to shake her head, like she's trying to reset herself. Her eyes are slightly clearer when it stills, and she grimaces.

"Shit," she mutters. She ineffectually wipes her face with her arm, then presses the heels of her palms against her sweat covered forehead. "*Shit.* I'm– I'm good. You can go back to bed. Sorry."

Jemma moves to sit down near Daisy's feet. She momentarily considers laying a hand on her leg, then thinks better of it when she sees her still clenched fists. She'd rather *not* get reflexively punched by the insanely dense super soldier if she can avoid it. She settles for fidgeting with a corner of the blanket instead.

"I don't mind," she tells her. "I was already awake."

Daisy nods, though Jemma doesn't think her words actually registered. Her hands have slid down to cover her eyes, and she's started mumbling something under her breath.

"–okay, you're okay," Jemma just barely makes out. It's quiet enough that, if she weren't watching Daisy's lips move, she almost wouldn't hear anything at all. "Door's unlocked, Mary, you're *okay,* you fucking–"

Daisy cuts herself off, biting down on her bottom lip until a single bead of blood appears, right underneath her left canine. She rocks back and forth a few times, before stilling herself and taking a deep, shuddering inhale. The kind you take when you surface after being underwater for too long.

"…it's late," she says, nearly doubled over. "You should go back to bed."

"Early, actually," Jemma corrects, then decides that Daisy is probably lucid enough to not lash out if she's touched, and hesitantly lays a hand on her shin. The Inhuman twitches once, but doesn't react past that. "How often does this happen?"

"Why are you awake?" Daisy asks, instead of answering the question. She drops her hands from her face and straightens up, though her red, swollen eyes are settled on some spot just past Jemma's left shoulder.

Jemma sighs quietly, noting with slight concern that Daisy minutely flinches at the sound.

"I couldn't sleep," she says, acquiescing to the attempt at changing the subject. "I decided to get some work done instead."

She gestures vaguely at the laptop on the table behind her, but Daisy's eyes track the movement of her hand instead of looking at what she was pointing at. Between that, the pointed ears, the sharp teeth, the unnatural stillness, and the eyes reflecting in the darkness, Jemma feels a bit like how she imagines a rabbit being stalked by a wolf would.

(Or maybe it's the other way around.)

"I think I lost track of time," she continues, immediately dropping her hand back onto her lap, if only so Daisy will stop making that wary, almost scared expression. Fitz makes the same one sometimes. Her stomach turns at the connection. "I've been– your lip is bleeding."

Her lip is split open where she bit it, fresh blood bubbling up from the wound. She'd broken the skin a minute ago, but Jemma didn't realize it was as bad as it is.

Daisy gives her a confused look, before swiping her thumb over her mouth. Her face pales slightly when it comes away red.

"…oh," she says, voice distant again. "I could taste it. But I thought–"

She gets an odd look on her face, but Jemma doesn't have to try to puzzle it out like she sometimes does. She recognizes it. Sees it in the mirror when it's too dark, too silent, when she's hungry, or thirsty, or tired, or scared. When she looks up at the stars and, just for a second, still expects to see a completely different night sky.

I thought I was still stuck in a memory. I thought I was back there. I thought it was happening again.

What *it* is for Daisy right now, she isn't sure. But Jemma knows uncomfortably well how it feels to be caught in the in between.

"What were you dreaming about?" She asks quietly, and Daisy stills.

She stares at her for a moment, before lying back down on her side. Her balled up fist, clenched so tightly her knuckles are white, presses against her forehead, and she swallows harshly. Jemma tries to catch her eyes, but she manages to avoid it every time.

"I don't remember," she lies.

Chapter End Notes

said through gritted teeth **I do not struggle with The Gay Fanfiction Problem.**

Jemma you and your unaddressed PTSD are so dear to me. Yes girl I'm sure nothing bad will ever happen to you again if you just stay alert and completely prepared for the worst case scenario at any given moment! Hypervigilance ftw!!

Fun fact: with the exception of chapter six (and the specifics about her childhood), all the things that FitzSimmons notice about Daisy in this are actually canon! So prepare for me to cite my sources; in this case, her nightmares (while not about her childhood) are seen in s2 eps 11 and 13, and s3 ep21 :)

Okay Max out. See you in a few days.

Chapter 2: she flinches

Chapter Notes

Author's note canceled GUESS WHO GOT HAYLEY WILLIAMS TICKETS 🎉🎉🎉🎉🎉□□□□□🎟🎟🎟🎟🎟

GIRL WHO IS GOING TO BE OKAY DOT PNG

Chapter specific trigger warnings

-The child abuse is more explicit this time around, though the explicit nature of it has more to do with Fitz's past than Daisy's
-This chapter takes place pretty soon after the Framework. Fitz is in a really bad headspace as a result, and the narration very much reflects it
-Very very lightly implied past sexual abuse, in the canon typical Hive/AIDA sense. Such is the nature of writing about post s3 Daisy/post s4 Fitz I fear
-Once again, unaddressed PTSD from literally everyone

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Fitz was nine years old, his father broke his arm.

He'd tripped and fallen and broken something, though he couldn't tell you what; it was probably important if the reaction is any indication, but evidently not important enough for him to remember what it was. His father had grabbed him by the arm when he tried to run right after, and twisted it until something cracked, then splintered, then shattered. He doesn't quite remember anything past that, other than crying until he threw up.

When he and his ma finally got back from the hospital– where he told everyone he fell off his bike, which he *knew* couldn't cause the type of break he had, but nobody asked him about it, so he didn't say anything either– he locked himself in his room for the rest of the day.

He distinctly remembers, even now, years and years and years later, staring at himself in the mirror, at the look in his eyes that he couldn't recall being there that morning. It was the same one his ma had, and Callum Birney in P5 before he stopped showing up to school one day, and that woman who lived next to them with her boyfriend for a couple of months when they finally left.

The same look that he saw on his first field operation, when he made accidental eye contact with the hacker they had just picked up.

So Fitz knows too. *Obviously* Fitz knows, and she knows he knows, and he knows she knows he knows, and they never, ever talk about it. Not really.

It remains an unspoken thing between them, communicated entirely through reassuring touches, commiserating looks, quietly muttered words late at night, and one singular conversation that happened years ago, right after everything with her parents.

All he knows for certain is what he's managed to piece together himself. God knows *she's* certainly not confirming any of it.

He knows she grew up in foster care, in an orphanage run by nuns. He knows she hates the religion she was raised in, the one she still believes in more than she'll ever admit, far more than she so deeply wishes she did. He knows she still has the blanket they found her wrapped in. He knows she's just as bad at eye contact as he is, but she's much better at hiding it. He knows she prefers to isolate when she's overwhelmed, that she covers her head if you raise your voice when she's scared, that her left ring finger is slightly crooked and won't bend all the way from an improperly healed break.

He knows that she flinches.

Fitz doesn't do that. His father didn't often got physical with him, just frequently enough that he never quite expected it, because the anticipation– the *not knowing* is always worse than when it actually comes; he never really learned to flinch as a result. Not regularly, at least. It's not an instinct for him, more like a habit he's fallen out of. It's happened a few times over the past couple of years, but it was more because of what *Ward* did to him than anyone else.

For her–

He can't tell whether or not his assessment of the frequency is accurate, or if he's just become paranoid over it. But once he notices it the first time, he can't stop.

He sees it *everywhere.*

It's never anything major, and *definitely* never when they're working, or on a mission. But when they're at home, or even on base but don't have anything actively going on, and someone near her moves too

quickly, or too suddenly, or raises a hand in her direction, Daisy will *flinch.*

Her eyes will close and her shoulders will tense and her head will minutely twitch to the side, before she abruptly straightens up again like nothing even happened at all. Start to finish, the entire reaction will happen in less than two seconds.

Fitz notices it. He doesn't think anyone else does, until the time he looks away from where Daisy is pretending like she didn't just reveal more than she's ever wanted to, and looks straight at May. She's staring right back at him, her mouth curved downwards into a frown.

He never says anything about it.

(He never says anything about *anything,* it seems. It's been three months now, since the mess he helped create was destroyed, and he still can't–)

(How many problems– how many people– how much *suffering* could he have prevented, if he had only ***said something?***)

It comes to a head one day, out of nowhere. It's just the two of them when it happens; Jemma is out, running errands or something of that nature, and for the past eighty three minutes they've both just been existing in complete silence.

They don't really… *talk* anymore. Not like they used to.

Three months in, and living with Daisy has been– *rough* so far, on the best of days, for Fitz. She's still his best friend, of course, just as much as Jemma is. He loves her, and he thinks he always will in some way or another.

But that doesn't change what she's done. What *he's* done.

Because Fitz knows what it feels like to have his trachea slowly crushed under her unrelenting grip, his pleading met with nothing but promises. He knows what it looks like to have her huddled in the corner, bloodied and bruised because of him. He knows betrayal. He knows pain. He knows being so deeply filled with shame and disgust and *hate* for yourself because of all the suffering you've caused.

He knows, better than anyone in his life, what it feels like when you can't trust your own body, your own *mind* anymore. Not after they changed it, warped it, *perverted* it. Not after what you did for them.

Not after what *they* did to ***you.***

Well. Almost anyone.

He thinks the worst part of it all is that the only person who will ever *really* understand is just ten feet down the hall at any given moment. She's right next to him. They're lightyears apart. She understands him more than anyone will ever be able to, and they've never been able to talk about it. He doesn't know if they ever will.

She's the only person who'll *ever* be able to get it, and here he is: watching her unload the dishwasher in silence.

He knows she knows he's watching her; the tension in her shoulders and the way she hasn't looked at him even once since she started are evidence enough of that. It's why he hasn't gotten a glass of water despite needing one for the past hour. It's awkward enough with them on opposite ends of the apartment. He can only imagine how much worse it'd be in close quarters.

It eventually gets to be too much, though, because everything always does. His throat reaches a level of dryness that's simply intolerable, so he stands from his position in the armchair, grits his teeth through the pins and needles in his limbs, and slinks into the kitchen.

Daisy glances up at him when he enters, like she hadn't been perfectly aware he was approaching, probably before he even stood up. The cabinet he needs to reach is behind her, and so is the sink, and their kitchen is only so big. Fitz sets his shoulders and resolves to make it as quick as possible.

The trip there works out fine. They end up parallel to each other at one point, but they both cringe away so entirely that's it's more akin to ships passing in the night than any sort of human interaction. He almost laughs, before he remembers *why* they're both so hesitant to brush against each other.

It's not particularly funny after that.

Fitz keeps his eyes down as he pulls a plastic cup down from the cabinet (his tremor has intermittently shown back up since–) and fills it with lukewarm water from the sink. It refreshes him enough that he almost considers saying something. He even opens his mouth, only to immediately close it again.

(He hears Daisy inhale behind him, but she stays silent too. She's

hunched over the counter with her back to him when he looks, shoulders up by her ears. One hand is flat against the countertop. The other is pressed over her eyes.)

(He doesn't stay looking for very long.)

The trip there is fine. It's the way back that goes wrong.

He bumps into her on accident.

"Oh, sorr–" he starts to say, but the cup she was holding has already slipped from her hand. He winces as she fumbles with it for a second, already able to see where this is going. Sure enough, she's unable to get a good grip on it again, and the glass falls, shattering against the hardwood. Fitz jerks back a step to avoid getting cut, swearing under his breath all the while.

"Sorry," he mumbles, as he goes to grab the broom from the closet. Then, because he thinks he might start crying from sheer grief if he doesn't bloody ***SAY SOMETHING*** *to her, Leopold, you FUCKING*– "Hey, at least we're both wearing shoes, yeah?"

She doesn't respond, but he didn't really expect her to. He doesn't think she's looked at him even once in the entire time they've lived here. Or maybe he hasn't looked at her. Is the distinction important?

(He hasn't looked at her. He hasn't looked at *himself*. He hasn't looked at anything but his computer, at the now inert lines of code that were going to change the world, the same ones that ended his.)

(Jemma hasn't said anything about the sheets that are sometimes hanging over the mirrors. Daisy hasn't either, but he caught her staring at them once. When he looked at her face in his peripheral vision, her eyes were screwed shut. He thinks that might be worse than if she had just said something.)

(Is that worse? Are they the same? Does she choke on her guiltfeargriefloathinglonging too? Has she woken up in a cold sweat, missing something she wishes she couldn't name? Can she forgive anyone for not seeing? Did she ever find out how to bleed out any of the shame? Is she suffocating under the weight of it all? Did her world end? Is it still?)

(Is the distinction important?)

"Do you know where the broom is?" He asks, because it isn't where it's

supposed to be, and if he doesn't say it he thinks he'll start screaming. Or sobbing, maybe. "It's not in the closet. Did you use–?"

Daisy hasn't moved from where she was standing when he glances at her. Fitz tilts his head quizzically.

"Are you alright?" He says, a bit distracted, still half searching around. When she doesn't respond, he slows to a stop a few feet away from her, and really looks.

She's still standing in the same exact spot she was when she dropped the cup, staring down at the broken glass with wide eyes. Her breathing is shallow when he holds his own to listen, but not particularly rapid. Like her nervous system started to panic, but shut down partway through.

She hums noncommittally in response to his question, twisting her fingers around. Fitz frowns.

"…Daisy?"

She inhales sharply at the sound of her name, blinking a few times.

"Yeah," she says. She still hasn't looked away from the glass.

"Are you… okay? Did you get cut?"

"Um." She shakes her head and finally turns to look at him, still blinking more than normal. "No, I don't… I don't think so."

"…you don't think so?"

He looks her up and down several times, somewhat frantically because something is obviously *wrong,* but he can't see any blood anywhere, so he writes it off as the awkwardness that's been surrounding their interactions for three months now. It's then that he finally spots the broom; it's right behind her, wedged in the small gap in between the counter and the fridge for some reason. He reaches out to grab it, without thinking anything of her being in the way.

Daisy immediately stumbles backwards, slamming the small of her back against the countertop. She turns her head to the side, her arms jerking up to cover her face.

The apartment freezes. The air solidifies. The Earth stops spinning.

Fitz goes still, his arm still outstretched. After a second he recoils to

the other side of the kitchen, bracing a hand on the marble behind him. The other curls presses flat against his thigh, his nails digging into the fabric. She's not moving either, aside from the tremoring in her shoulders, the shaking of her balled up fists.

He can hear her breath trembling.

"…sorry," she says after a moment, or maybe an eternity. She's still curled up. He can tell she's not apologizing for the cup.

He doesn't know *why* she's apologizing, though, much less to *him.* He's the last person still alive who deserves any kind of apology from her.

Fitz opens his mouth.

He doesn't know what he means to say. *I get it,* maybe. *It wasn't as bad for me as I think it might've been for you,* even. *He broke my arm, once. I said I fell off my bike. What did they do to you? What did you say if anyone asked?*

I'm sorry, he thinks. *I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm–*

"Are you scared of me?"

He starts cursing himself in his mind the second it leaves his mouth, so quietly he almost didn't hear himself. He bites down on his tongue in punishment, until he starts to taste iron.

Daisy's arms drop from over her head, and she stares at him with wide eyes. She opens her mouth to answer him, then slowly closes it with a pained look on her face.

It's answer enough.

"I'm not– I'm not *scared* of you, Fitz," she says eventually, even though she's staring down at his shoes. She's mirroring his pose now, probably without even realizing it. Fitz has the sudden urge to laugh, for no particular reason.

"No?" He asks, raising his eyebrows. "So you would've flinched if it were Jemma?"

He doesn't know why he's getting hung up on this. Why he can feel himself getting *mean.* He knows this has so little to do with him, and everything to do with what happened to her before they even knew

each other.

No, that's a lie. He knows exactly why.

"I was scared of you," he says, crossing his arms over his chest. "After you choked me. For a while."

"That's not–" she starts to say, but he cuts her off before she can finish.

"I hurt you in– in there," Fitz reminds her with a scoff. "I hit you. You weren't giving me what I wanted, so *I hit you.* That's exactly the kind of thing that *should* scare *you* of all people."

Daisy jerks back like he slapped her all over again, her face paling. She presses her lips together, shaking her head a few times, and Fitz feels so fucking ***angry*** he thinks it might kill him.

"Making me mad at you isn't going to help," she tells him after a moment of tense silence, looking distinctly (and he would know, it's the same exact look he sees the few times he's managed to look in the mirror) like she's about to start dry heaving.

He frowns. "What?"

"It doesn't make it go *away,* Leo," she grits, looking at anything but him, and it's like a bucket of ice gets dropped down the back of his shirt, like all his organs disappeared all at once, leaving him completely hollow. "I know you hate yourself for what you did, believe me, *I get it.* But I don't–"

Daisy sighs tiredly, pinching the bridge of her nose. Fitz feels how he imagines the dirt on the bottom of his shoe would. *Less* than.

"*God,* you think I don't *know* what–" she starts, before laughing, entirely humorlessly. "*Yes,* Fitz. I would've flinched if it were Jemma. I would've flinched no matter who it was. Because *it has nothing to do with you.*"

"I'm– sorry," he stammers. "I'm– I don't know what–"

"Yes," Daisy says, and grabs the broom. The broken glass crunches underneath her shoes. "You do."

He stumbles back a step when she shoves it against his chest, his arms coming up a beat too late to catch it. It clatters onto the floor, but neither of them pay any attention to it.

Daisy searches his face for a moment, before she sighs quietly and turns away. He thinks it might've hurt less if she had just choked him again.

"I'm going out," she mutters, heading straight for the exit. She doesn't grab a jacket before opening the front door, even though it's almost winter.

"Daisy," Fitz says– begs? He thinks he might be begging. "I'm *sorry*."

(Sorry I said it sorry I did it sorry I hurt you sorry I couldn't forgive you sorry I held it against you sorry I couldn't help you sorry I couldn't protect you sorry I could never save you sorry sorry *sorry*.)

(He isn't sure which part he's apologizing for.)

(Any of it. *All* of it.)

She pauses in the open doorway, and inhales so deeply her shoulders rise. She drops her head down for a second, her back still to him, and presses a hand over her face.

"Yeah," she tells him. "I know."

He stands there and watches helplessly while she steps outside.

The door softly clicks shut behind her.

Chapter End Notes

> "Making me mad at you isn't going to help," she says, as if she's not intentionally calling him Leo to make him mad at her. Three cheers for trying to get your loved ones to hate you as self harm! 🎉
>
> Keen eyed readers will notice that the three month mark is when Fitz and Daisy had their breakthrough/beginning of reconciliation in the previous installment. That scene and this one are in fact related.
>
> Also yes "she still has the blanket they found her wrapped in" is in fact a reference to the blanket from the first installment, in the scene where they talk about Ward's death. She still carries her baby blanket around with her ☹

Sources for this chapter: Skye flinches/covers her head when she's scared/overwhelmed in s2 ep11, *and* spaces out/has some sort of flashback when she breaks glass in s2 ep17 :)

Chapter 3: she was homeless

Chapter Notes

Pretty big time skip between last chapter and this one. The first two took place during the events of the previous installment, but from here on out it takes place after that fic is over.

Chapter specific trigger warnings

-As always, implied child abuse
-Conversations about homelessness, including that of a minor
-Again, implied past sexual abuse. Such is the nature of writing about Daisy in *general* if you pay close enough attention :(
-Like. Overwhelming sappiness near the end? idk man they're gross and in love

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They notice more once they're together.

In an official capacity, that is. If you were to ask Jemma (and– probably a lot of people that know them) (which is to say that Jemma *did* ask a lot of people that know them, and several of them said they thought the three of them were already together in some way or another) (which was *embarrassing,* that so many people figured it out before she did) (this is her and Fitz all over again) (no one has said anything, but she's fairly certain money exchanged hands in their team) (a few weeks ago they even received an "anonymous" letter, signed with a drawing of a bird, thanking them for helping the author win a bet against an unnamed Liverpool F.C. fan) (seriously, how did they even find out about them, much less find their *address*), they've been together far longer than they've been *together,* if that makes any amount of sense.

The change was awkward at first, on all three ends, filled with hesitation (Jemma), embarrassment (Fitz), and more than a little avoidance (take a wild guess), before they all realized that absolutely nothing about their current dynamic had to change just because there was a new label for it. It got easier after that, or as easy as a relationship in their line of work can be. Based on the track record their team has (in no particular order: divorce, incredibly tumultuous, staged death after real death and later resurrection, forced by rogue AI, death, more divorce, which was then followed by death, evilest

person on the planet, death, the inspiration for the literal devil, death, went to hell (?), more death), Jemma likes to think they're doing quite well so far.

There are still issues at times, of course. Jemma has to have a light on in their bedroom if she doesn't want to wake up screaming, and Fitz still gets overwhelmed with guilt on occasion, and Daisy's last serious relationship ended in a murder/suicide. She'd be concerned if there *weren't* any issues.

As it is, though, it's been good. *Really* good.

Fitz isn't home at the moment. He's off at therapy, so it's just the two of them. And the dog, but the dog doesn't like Jemma, so Jemma pointedly does not count the dog.

She hums in contentment, very much enjoying basking in the sunlight streaming in through the living room window across from her. She'd been reading a minute ago, but decided to take a break for a bit.

"You're staring at me."

She blinks at the words, lifting her chin from where it was propped up on her palm. Daisy hasn't moved from her spot on the other side of the couch, hasn't even looked up from her borderline falling apart copy of Ender's Game (it doesn't even have a *cover,* for God's sake. Jemma wants to throw it away so badly, but Daisy loves that stupid thing, so she's begrudgingly refrained), but she knows the comment was directed towards her all the same.

"No I'm not," she says, even though she had just unabashedly been doing exactly that.

"Yes, you are," Daisy huffs. "Why, what do you want?"

"I can't just like looking at you?"

Daisy doesn't respond to that, just hikes her book higher, until her face is covered. Jemma stifles a smile behind her hand when she sees the tips of her ears slowly start to blush.

She wasn't lying; she really does just like looking at her. She always has, for a variety of reasons (ranging from *wow, this new consultant sure is pretty,* to *huh, her canine teeth are unusually sharp,* to *Stahl's ear? That's interesting,* to *okay, very much not Stahl's ear,* to *I wonder how else her anatomy differs,* all the way back around to *wow, Daisy sure is*

pretty), though she's never really let herself. There's not very many good reasons to be caught staring at your coworker like a creep, even if you *are* friends.

But she has an *excuse* now. She's been staring quite a bit as a result, and noticing things she'd never quite noticed before.

Like Daisy's propensity for chewing on things when she's distracted– Jemma can't count the number of destroyed pens she's found over the years, or even the number of times Daisy has accidentally drawn blood from her lips or fingers– or her tendency to quietly hum to herself while she's working, which, looking back, Jemma is fairly certain she didn't do before Terrigenesis, or the way she never quite makes perfect eye contact, which she never noticed before now because she doesn't either, or the small, barely there grin she makes when someone says or does something stupid, like she's trying not to laugh at them, or how her ears will twitch when she's flustered, which has been happening a lot lately, or even her posture.

Daisy always sits curled up, with all her limbs folded close to her body. Someone who knew her less might think it has something to do with being afraid to take up space, but Jemma knows better. Unlike a lot of Daisy's quirks, this one has nothing– or very little, at least– to do with fear.

No, this is more– *awareness,* if that makes sense. Less that she's afraid of taking up space, and more so that she's always painfully aware of just how much free space there is in any given environment, and subsequently how much of it she has room to exist in.

It occurs to Jemma, at that exact moment, perhaps for the first time, that Daisy was living in a *van* when they first found her. She's never really thought about that part before, even though she probably should've.

She supposes it's technically possible that she did it willingly– she knows stuff like that is a bit of trend for rich people with nothing better to do with their lives or money than to cosplay poverty (…she thinks Daisy's socialist rants might be rubbing off on her)– but Daisy is so far from the type of person to do something like that. No, it's much more likely that it was out of *necessity,* and that's…

Concerning. It's concerning.

"What was your van like?"

Daisy goes still at the question. She looks up at Jemma after a moment, before dog earring (Jesus) her page and setting her book on her lap.

"Um," she says, sounding slightly confused. "I had a multi-monitor computer set up in the back. It's where I did the majority of my work. I had to be really careful when I was–"

"I don't mean the layout," Jemma cuts her off. "You were living in a van when we found you."

"…we've established that, yes."

"No, I mean–" She huffs, crossing her arms over her chest. Daisy poorly stifles a smile at her frustration, and Jemma frowns. "Daisy, you were a high school drop out–"

"Were? I think I technically still *am.* I never got my GED."

"–without a job–"

"Okay, *ouch.* Freelance counts." Then, with a grin (and the very specific look in her eyes that means she's about to get on her soapbox), "Besides, *proletarier aller länder, vereinigt euch!* Nothing to lose but our–"

"You were *homeless,*" Jemma interrupts, and all the amusement rapidly slides off of Daisy's face, abruptly and all at once. "You were homeless, and we…"

She trails off after that, folding her hands in her lap and biting her lip. Out of nowhere, she feels the beginning of tears pricking at the backs of her eyes. She's not going to cry, but her face is getting warm.

(She doesn't quite know how she was planning on finishing that sentence. You were homeless, and we helped you? Needed you? Barely gave you a choice? Threw a bag over your head and abducted you off the street? Would've made you disappear if you said no? Gave you everything you had been looking for? Potentially ruined your life? Almost definitely saved it?)

"Where are you going with this?" Daisy asks, looking back down at her book. Her voice sounds artificially light, in her *this conversation is bothering me but I don't want you to know* way.

"Was it… hard?"

"I think you just answered your own question." Jemma doesn't respond to that. Daisy laughs tightly. "*Yeah,* Jemma. *Obviously.* What were you expecting me to say?"

"I don't know," she tells her, bouncing her leg a few times. "I guess– I think I just hoped that it wasn't, somehow."

Daisy stares at her for a moment, before sighing and lying back against the arm of the couch. "It was better once I had my van," she admits.

"Once…?" Jemma hedges, feeling her heart start to sink.

"It's not like I just spawned on the street with a fully functioning car. I didn't really have any money for like a solid year and a half." She lifts her head up and grins sardonically. "I couch surfed for a while. You don't want to hear about that part."

"What do you–"

"Jemma," Daisy interrupts. She frowns for a moment, her eyebrows drawing together, before her face smooths back over. "That means I don't want to talk about that part."

"…right," Jemma acquiesces, vaguely sick over the pattern of things Daisy *doesn't want to talk about.* So far, that list includes (but is far from limited to) Ward, Hive, her relationship with that Miles guy, why she sometimes needs to go back to sleeping on the couch for a night or two, why she prefers to stay clothed around them since they've started dating when she was fine with partial states of undress before, why they need to be careful to avoid sneaking up on her when she's in bed, and now this. She doesn't have to think very hard about it to notice a common through line. "Sorry."

"It's okay. It's just… it's not exactly a time in my life I'm fond of looking back on."

"The couch surfing?"

"*Any* of it," Daisy says, eyebrows raised. "I don't exactly expect you to get what it was like. And I don't– God, I don't *want* you to get it. Ever. But it's–"

She cuts herself off with a laugh, dragging a hand down her face.

"Christ, Jemma, I lived in a *van.* That *worked!* That's practically a

mansion compared to some of the people I knew."

"…but you didn't always," Jemma says quietly, putting together what she's not saying. Daisy nods slowly.

"No. And maybe I'll tell you about it someday, but right now–"

She stops there, chewing on the inside of her cheek, before she tilts her head to stare down at her lap.

"I know– back when we first met, I seemed– *fine.* Normal. Okay with everything. But it was… hard."

Daisy grimaces at her own word choice, like she's unhappy with it, but can't think of a better way to phrase it. Or maybe she can, and she just doesn't want to say it out loud.

Jemma lets the words turn over in her mind, trying not to think too hard about the unsaid implications. It's painfully *easy* to think about it, though, all the statistics she knows playing on loop in her head.

Like how people that are actively homeless have a life expectancy that's nearly thirty years shorter than ones who aren't, and the disproportionate rates of substance abuse disorders and violence and disease and abuse, and how all of it is just more likely to happen if you were in the foster care system, and how it's all so much worse for–

Oh, God.

"You–" she starts, before her voice gives out. "You were twenty when you joined SHIELD–"

"Nineteen," Daisy corrects, and Jemma's heart finishes its descent into her stomach. "I turned twenty about halfway between joining and everything going to shit. And I ran away when I was sixteen, if that's where you're going with this."

Sixteen.

Sixteen.

When Jemma was sixteen, she was still in school. Granted, she was starting at the academy, and sure, she already had two doctorates at that point, so it's not the best basis of comparison. But right up until she moved out, she still went to a paediatrician. Her parents still drove her around most of the time. There were movies she wasn't

allowed to watch because of their rating. She still had a *curfew,* for God's sake.

Daisy was already homeless when she was sixteen. Had already run away. Felt so desperately unhappy or unloved or *unsafe* that she willingly traded a roof over her head, at the very least her basic needs met, for sleeping on the street. She was likely hungry, and cold, and Jemma really doesn't want to think about it any more than she already is.

She remembers being sixteen, and arguing with her parents, once, in a distinctly sixteen year old fashion. She didn't argue with them often, but when she did she had a tendency to go all out; slamming doors, screaming into pillows, yelling herself hoarse at them. It got her into trouble, sure, but in the way sixteen year olds are *meant* to get into trouble.

Did Daisy ever do that?

Was she even *able* to?

The only reason Jemma acted the way she did was because she knew the worst she would get was grounded. She has a sick feeling her teenage angst pales in comparison.

(She tries to picture Daisy at sixteen, and finds that it's disturbingly easy, especially considering what she knows now, how young she was back when they first met. Or Fitz at sixteen, or even *herself,* baby faced and naive, readier than they'd both ever been for their first day at the academy. She'd felt so *adult* then. Now, as an actual adult, she just feels queasy, and decides that she'll never not be grateful that recruiting *children* is one of the practices SHIELD left behind when they rebuilt.)

"Can I ask…" she starts, before trailing off. She's doing that a lot, she knows, but it's not exactly as if she has even the foggiest idea of how to approach this conversation. "…why did you run away?"

Daisy pales. She looks down at her lap again, her hands slowly curling into fists.

"I'd, uh–" She cuts herself off and swallows harshly. "I'd rather not talk about that part, yet."

Jemma tenses for a moment, her earlier thoughts ringing in her head, before she forces her muscles to loosen. She nods, even though Daisy

can't see it, and scoots closer on the couch.

"It's okay, baby," she says softly, reaching out and tucking a lock of Daisy's hair behind her ear. "We don't have to right now."

Her inhuman twitches once, before relaxing into the touch. She turns her head and presses her face into Jemma's palm, then slowly smiles.

"…what'd you call me?"

Jemma frowns, pulling back slightly. "I'm sorry, did you not like it? I can–"

"No, no," Daisy interrupts, grabbing her wrist and bringing her hand to her face again. "It's fine. *More* than fine. I just didn't peg you for pet names. I don't think I've ever heard you *or* Fitz use one."

"We don't, normally."

"Oh." She's grinning now, the tips of her ears slowly turning purplish red. Jemma can feel her sharp teeth scrape against her palm any time either of them moves. It's doing something to her. Good God. "So you're saying I'm special?"

Jemma laughs. She rises up into a kneel and shuffles forward, until Daisy is leaning back against the arm of the couch. Her skin is warm underneath Jemma's hands, her knee pressing into her side.

"Yes, baby. *Very* special."

Daisy lets out some unintelligible noise at that– part laugh, part sigh, part something else entirely (that… might actually be impossible to replicate with regular human vocal cords)– that Jemma doesn't think she could recreate if she tried. Her entire face is flushed now, and she's grinning uncontrollably behind the heel of her palm.

"Oh, my God," she says gleefully, as Jemma presses even further forward, bracing her hands on her ribcage. "You *like* me. That's so embarrassing."

Jemma finds herself smiling back as she leans forward and presses her lips to Daisy's carotid, just to feel her already rapid pulse leap even higher. Still, she knows it doesn't quite reach her eyes.

She doesn't know how it *can,* when someone she's loved for half a decade still gets surprised when she's even liked.

Chapter End Notes

Chekov's childhood trauma....

So I accidentally created a subplot of Jemma realizing that SHIELD kinda sucks sometimes LMAO. She'll never get there entirely, but the fact that the Framework is the last majorly major threat they've dealt with in this AU, over a year ago at this point, means that she has the time and (relative, they're still very closely involved with SHIELD) distance to think about things she's never really been able to think about before. Like the fact that she was still a kid when they recruited her ☹

Again, though, she'll never get there entirely. I promise you at like the same exact time she's thinking about how grateful she is they don't recruit kids anymore she's also like, "Wow, it sure has been a while since we put Daisy in a cage. We should do that again for old time's sake :)"

(Daisy, crucially, is thinking, "Man, I really wish they had to put me in a cage again so I could show them how good and obedient I am by not breaking out even though I very obviously and easily could :(" Gee if only there were some easy solution to this. Maybe something that rhymes with "tearing a dollar.")

Anyways sound off in the comments if I should make an analysis post about the surprising pervasiveness of sexual violence (both allegorical and literal) in Daisy's plotlines. I'm not kidding once you start noticing it it's literally everywhere.

Source for this chapter: idfk man episode 1?? She lived in a van dude what more can I say. Multiple times mind you. Plus her being a high school dropout implies (to me at least) that she was still a teenager when she ran away, if not still underage.

Chapter 4: she gets scared

Chapter Notes

Chapter four time yaaayy

Chapter specific trigger warnings

-As always, implied past child abuse, specifically of a religious nature this time around
-Panic attacks/flashbacks
-Dissociation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When– as they're on their way home from a one-on-one date night– Daisy stops in the middle of the sidewalk, and stands up straight and alert out of absolutely nowhere, Fitz feels his heart leap into his throat.

"What?" He quietly asks as his eyes dart around for threats, surreptitiously lowering his hand to his concealed ICER. "What is it?"

He's not particularly surprised that something is going wrong– thank you kindly, Edward A. Murphy (*Yhprum's law,* the Jemma-in-his-mind retorts, and *honestly, Fitz, you really oughtn't be so defeatist all the time*)– but by God, was he hoping nothing would.

He supposes it was bound to happen sooner or later. They haven't dealt with anything immediately and imminently world ending for a– quite frankly– shocking amount of time now (over five months as of yesterday!) (he always holds his breath and knocks on wood when the number on the whiteboard is erased and rewritten) (sue him, you get surprisingly superstitious when you're in their line of work for long enough), and everyone has been a bit on edge as a result, including him.

But despite Daisy still alerting next to him, another moment passes with absolutely nothing happening, and Fitz slowly starts to (very, very slightly, mind you) relax when she makes no further movements.

Still, she doesn't tell him what caught her attention, and her face is worryingly pale when he glances at her, her eyes fixed on one spot. When he looks in the direction she's staring at he sees plenty, but nothing that's immediately or obviously a threat. He only sees people,

buildings, cars, a few animals, and the park they're passing by. No weapons, no threats. The only even slightly bizarre thing is a group of nuns slowly making their way down the opposite sidewalk, and even then none of them stand out to him in any way.

"You're freaking me out," he mutters, digging his elbow into her side in an attempt to get a reaction from her. "Do I need to call reinforcements or not?"

She opens her mouth to say something, then shakes her head. There's an odd look on her face, and her body is still wrought with tension, but Fitz relaxes at the confirmation that their evening isn't going to suddenly turn into a shootout, or something equally insane. Time traveling alien robots or something like that. Nothing surprises him anymore.

(Actually, he probably shouldn't have thought that. He might've just jinxed it.)

"Okay, then what's going on?" He asks.

Daisy mumbles something under her breath. He knows she said– *something,* he saw her lips move, but he couldn't make out a single syllable.

"What did you–"

"*Sphenisciphobia,*" she repeats, slightly louder this time. Her jaw is clenched so tight that he's slightly worried she's going to crack a tooth. "It's– look it up."

Fitz pulls his phone out to do that, because he can tell she either can't or won't explain it to him any further. His search engine takes a second to load (after he finally parses out how to spell it based on hearing it once, or at least a close enough approximation), but he frowns when it does.

"…you're afraid of penguins?" He asks, glancing up at her and feeling incredibly confused. He almost looks around to see if he somehow missed an errant colony of them–maybe he *can* still be surprised– but she shakes her head, so he looks back down at his phone to read the other definitions.

Fear of penguins and things that look like them, as well as the fear of…

Oh. Huh. He didn't realize there was a word for that.

Fitz slips his phone back into his pocket, a grin slowly growing on his face. Daisy is still a statue next to him, but he suddenly finds himself amused (and endlessly endeared) by it.

To find out that his wonderful, handsome, strong, intelligent partner, who has faced fascists and aliens and rogue AI and even a subordinate of the literal devil without batting an eye, is scared of something as innocuous as *nuns* is–

He can't help it. He laughs.

A few of the people on the sidewalk around them glance in their direction, before looking away again. Daisy's shoulders curl inward, and Fitz presses his hand over his mouth in an attempt at muffling his laughter, because he does feel slightly bad about it.

"Are you serious?" He asks, grinning behind his palm, because he certainly doesn't feel bad enough to not rib her about it a bit. She'd probably do something similar to him, and turnabout is fair play.

Daisy's eyes flick over to him for a split second, before immediately darting right back over to the group of nuns. She nods once.

"It's okay," he says, trying to sound reassuring, just in case this is something that's embarrassing for her. "I was scared of clowns until I was twenty."

That's true, not just something he's saying to make her feel better. It was almost a lifelong fear, stemming from a rather unfortunate fifth birthday party that the less said about the better (he still gets slightly queasy at the sight of balloon animals), until he decided that if he ever wanted to be taken seriously as a SHIELD agent, he needed to stop being afraid of anything.

(Which is stupid, in retrospect. Good agents aren't the ones that are never afraid; those ones never last long. Good agents are the ones that are afraid and do it anyway. Fear keeps you alive, after all.)

His anecdote doesn't have the intended effect, though. If anything, she just tenses even further. Fitz frowns in response.

Spork whines at her side, and he looks down to see her shoving her nose against Daisy's hand. It doesn't seem to be working the way it should, because she's still not moving.

"Daisy–" Fitz starts, dread rapidly beginning to burn a hole in the pit of his stomach.

And then she reaches up and presses a hand just underneath the nape of her neck, right where he knows for a fact her skin is thick with scarring, and the fear on her face is very abruptly not funny anymore.

"Oh," he says, his heart sinking. "…*oh.*"

"Fitz, can we please go?"

Her voice is small when she says it, like she's worried about asking any louder. Her gaze is still resolutely locked on the group of nuns, and she's standing up straighter than he thinks he's ever seen her stand. He (*somehow,* amazingly enough) never realized she was this tall. She might have an inch or two on him, actually.

(Fitz imagines, a bit hysterically, that May would probably be pissed if she were here. The fact that what finally, finally, *finally* gets Daisy to fix her posture in the end isn't May's incessant hounding– of which he's had a front row seat to many times over the years– but a face-to-face confrontation with her unaddressed childhood trauma. Funny, right?)

(God.)

The nuns cross the street, onto their sidewalk, and Daisy screws her eyes shut in return. Spork leans back on her haunches, which means she's about to start trying to get her to sit down.

"*Leo,*" Daisy grits, her face paler than he's ever seen it, save for the times she's experienced major blood loss. Her right fist is tightly clenched by her thigh, and he blanches when he realizes what that probably means.

Sure enough, she winces when he touches her forearm.

"Okay," he says, immediately shifting his grip to her bicep, and pulling out his phone to text Jemma to have the medkit ready. "Okay, yeah, let's…"

He practically has to drag her to get her moving, which, with how dense she is for her powers, is *not* an easy feat, but eventually he gets her to take a stumbling step forward. It's thankfully easier from there, because she's always been good with momentum. They're only two blocks away from their apartment, but he can't help but look over at

her every few seconds, just to check on her.

They're long past the nuns by now, but that seems to have only marginally helped. She's sweating now, and there's a slightly glazed look in her eye. Spork hasn't looked away from her once. The only reason neither of them have run into anything yet is because Fitz is steering them in the right direction.

He has to let go of her arm once they make it to their building to dig his key to their apartment out of his pocket, but he retakes it as soon as he can. The quiet, barely there buzzing noise that'd been slowly increasing in volume cuts off the second he reestablishes contact.

"What *happened?*" Jemma asks as soon as they stumble in through the door, standing up from where she was waiting on the couch.

"Ran into some nuns," Fitz grunts, nearly toppling over when Daisy's legs give out and he very suddenly has to support her weight. He lowers her to the floor as slowly as he can, and she presses herself against the front door behind them.

"Sorry," she says, hiding her face in the crook of her elbow for a second, before lowering it when Spork shoves her snout underneath her arm. Her face is wet when she brings it back down, and she draws her legs up to her chest, her free hand slowly curling around her shin.

Fitz shoves her head down in between her knees the second he sees her pupils expand, and she groans out what he thinks might be an attempt at *thanks,* clutching at the back of her neck.

"Are you going to throw up?"

Daisy groans again and slowly shakes her head, before blanching and rapidly nodding it up and down. Jemma manages to shove a bowl in front of her face right as the first round of retching starts.

"*Sorry,*" she hiccups, once it's finally calmed down for a second, though her breathing is still way too fast for him to be comfortable. Spork is leaning her entire body weight against her at this point, but it doesn't seem like it's working. "Sorry, sorry, sorry."

"Fitz– ice pack," Jemma dictates, and he immediately stands to go grab one from the freezer. She grabs it when he offers it to her, then presses it to the back of Daisy's neck, who takes a deep, shuddering inhale when the temperature registers against her skin. Her muscles tense for a second, before they all simultaneously relax, and she

slumps back against the door.

"Sorry," she says one last time, though she sounds slightly calmer than she did a moment ago. She sniffs once, then attempts to dry her face with her sleeve.

"What happened, baby?" Jemma asks, wiping a tear from Daisy's face with her thumb.

Her expression screws up in a grimace at the question. Her eyes dart away, and her knees inch ever so closer to her chest.

"I have a– phobia," she says, and Fitz frowns.

"Phobias are, by definition, irrational," he corrects. "I'd say your reaction was perfectly understandable given what happened to you."

She opens her mouth to reply, but Jemma interrupts before she can get a word out.

"Arms," she says, pulling painkillers, bone growth pills, and Daisy's emergency wrist braces out of her med kit. Daisy uncurls and presents them without complaint (for once), and Jemma gets to work on securing any fractures that might've occurred.

Daisy dry swallows the pills, then tilts her head back against the door with a *thump*.

"Right," she says dryly. "*What happened to me.* That's one way of putting it, I guess."

Jemma makes a quiet noise of generalized disapproval, the way she always does whenever either of them gets cavalier about the things they've been through, especially in regards to when they were kids. A lot of people would probably find it at least a little bit patronizing, but Fitz doesn't mind it. He knows she does because she loves them, and doesn't like to think about them being hurt.

Daisy, on the other hand, is incapable of letting people care about her.

Her hackles have raised again, and Fitz sighs, rubbing his forehead, because there's no chance in hell she's talking about it now. At least not today. He loves Jemma, *obviously* he loves Jemma, but she has an unfortunate tendency to think she knows best in any given situation. And Daisy always listens to her, he thinks she'd probably break out in hives if she *didn't,* but that doesn't mean she doesn't occasionally get

agitated about it.

Daisy stays silent until her arms are done being splinted, then unceremoniously pushes herself to her feet. Spork immediately jumps up to join her.

"Thanks," she mutters, avoiding eye contact. "Sorry."

"Daisy…" Jemma starts as she stands up, but Fitz lays a hand on her shoulder. She huffs quietly, but doesn't say anything further.

"Don't do that," Daisy says, then gestures at their questioning looks. "*That.* The whole *poor little Daisy* thing."

"We don't do that," Fitz replies with a frown, but she gives him an incredulous look.

"Yes you do," she scoffs, collapsing onto the couch. "All of you do. Anytime any of you find anything out about my life from before we met, you get all– *weird.*"

"Okay, I'm sure–"

"Fitz," she interrupts, leaning against the cushions and pushing her hair back. "I told Mack something once. One thing. He couldn't look at me for three days. You get weird."

He doesn't know what to say to that. So he doesn't, just approaches the couch. Daisy watches him tiredly, but she's not flinching, so he'll take it.

She doesn't react when he takes her head in his hands, other than leaning into the hold very slightly. After a second he shifts his grip, sliding one of his hands around to the back of her neck, and pulls her forward.

Daisy exhales slowly when she makes contact with his torso, her shoulders slumping. They sit in silence for a moment, before her hand comes up and gently wraps around his wrist.

"I'm not gonna talk about it," she mumbles eventually, words muffled by the wool of his sweater. He almost doesn't hear it. "Don't get your hopes up."

"We know," he tells her, even as Jemma sighs quietly in frustration behind him. Daisy twitches in his hold at the sound, her fingers

flexing around his wrist, and he tightens his arms around her in response. "A few years ago you wouldn't've even said that much, though. I figure a couple more decades and you'll tell us your childhood nickname."

Daisy laughs into his stomach, before drawing back enough to look up at him, flashing her teeth in a grin. He softens at the sight of it, all the stress of the last hour and a half leaving his body all at once.

"Not on your life, Leopold."

Chapter End Notes

Daisy would not, in fact, make fun of a genuine fear of Fitz's, no matter how ridiculous it seemed. Yes Fitz and Jemma are both a little bit of dicks in this chapter, but that's because Fitz and Jemma are notoriously a little bit of dicks sometimes! Especially to poor long suffering Daisy, who is so good natured (and chronically abused/neglected) that she will literally just sit there and take it so long as they continue to love her and let her stay. Surely that would do no damage in the long run. But who cares because I think it's hot. Thinks about the phrase "Daisy sitting there and taking it from FitzSimmons" and gets so hard I pass out. Who said that.

Yes their relationship is largely happy. That said R.I.P. Daisy Johnson you would've loved shakily smoking a cigarette on the fire escape while blasting like the entirety of Puberty 2 by Mitski at a borderline dangerous volume in your earbuds.

Anyways.

My tall Daisy agenda.

Sources for this chapter: her freeze response when she's reminded of her childhood trauma in s2 ep17, plus the creepy fear dimension nun from s5 ep12. Never explicitly stated to be Daisy's fear, but gee I sure do wonder who on the team is scared of nuns. Could it maybe be the person who was raised by abusive nuns? 🤔 idk guys this is a real head scratcher.

Chapter 5: she has scars

Chapter Notes

> Huh I wonder about those tags :-) gee I sure do wonder when those tags are coming into play :-)))
>
> This chapter is over a thousand words longer than all the previous ones. The power of yuri almost smut.
>
> Chapter specific trigger warnings
>
> -As always, PTSD and past child abuse
> -References to past sucidal behavior, including the description of a healed scar from a past attempt
> -Implied self harm
> -There's like. One singular line that very lightly implies Daisy has a not entirely healthy relationship with sex. Lotta implications in this one

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's the middle of the night, and Jemma Simmons thinks she might die.

It's been hot lately, the type of hot where everything is annoying, and you want nothing more than to just lie there not doing anything at all. To add insult to injury, the central air conditioning is out in their building, so they've had to just stick a box fan in every window they have and hope for the best.

The blankets are all kicked to the foot of the bed, the fans in the room are on high, she's wearing nothing but underwear and the thinnest vest she owns, and she's still entirely too hot. The heat coming from the body next to her is making everything worse, and especially making it impossible to fall asleep. Jemma groans into her hands in frustration, then moves them away when it just makes her face even warmer than it already is.

"I'll never understand his ability to fall asleep anywhere, in any conditions," a voice says from across the room. "How is he not roasting to death right now?"

Jemma raises her head up to see Daisy standing in the doorway, backlit by the hallway lights. She's still in her work clothes, although her shoes are off and her hair is down. Spork trots in past her, free of

her vest, and settles in at the foot of the bed.

She looks otherworldly like this, standing in the dark, lit from behind. And Jemma means that literally: Daisy's face is shrouded in darkness, but she can just barely make out the shine of her pupils reflecting the light, in a distinctly *non* human way. It'd be slightly terrifying, if it weren't so comfortingly familiar.

"Hi, baby," Jemma greets tiredly, sitting up and stretching for a second, before reaching for Daisy as she approaches.

"Hi," she quietly responds, leaning down and pressing her face against Jemma's outstretched palm, keeping herself propped up with her hands. She has an embarrassed, slightly confused look on her face, the same one she always gets whenever they do anything to remind her that they actually *want* her, even all these months later. "Were you waiting for me?"

"Not on purpose," Jemma tells her. Then, because she's already able to tell where this will go, "I couldn't fall asleep. Don't feel bad."

Daisy gives her a wry grin as she pushes herself upright and starts undoing her belt. "Don't tell me what to do."

"You like when I tell you what to do."

There's a soft *thump* when Daisy trips over her pant leg, hitting the ground with a muffled stream of expletives. Jemma laughs. Fitz snores.

"Yeah, ha ha, laugh it up," Daisy grumbles as she stands back up, kicking her discarded work pants off to the side, leaving her in just her tshirt and boxers. She stretches for a second, then climbs her way onto the bed, lying down on top of the blankets.

"Are you able to cool the air a few degrees?" Jemma practically begs. "Just for a few minutes? I think I'm going to die."

Daisy blinks tiredly a few times, before she laughs softly, nodding.

"Yeah, if you let me concentrate for a second."

She closes her eyes after that, her fingers flexing where they're laying on her stomach. She takes a deep breath and holds it, and, after a few seconds of silence, the room starts to cool down as the molecules slow.

"That's not going to last super long," she says with a poorly stifled yawn, but Jemma shakes her head.

"It's more than enough. Thank you."

She goes to lay down and try to finally fall asleep, but pauses when Daisy stretches her arms above her head, her shirt riding up a few inches. Jemma shifts, settling back against the headboard instead.

She knows Daisy has scars. They all do.

Fitz has several on his hands and arms from accidents with his machinery, one on his shin where he got a compound fracture when he fell out of a tree when he was seven, and two on his scalp where they had to go in to try and reduce swelling in his brain.

Jemma herself has one down nearly the entire length of her spine, from when her brace stopped being enough and she had to get spinal fusion, and a few from her torture at the hands of Ward and Giyera. Not to mention the ones from her time on Maveth, but she hardly ever (two on her face, three on her legs, four on her arms, seven on her hands) thinks about those.

Daisy, though, is practically *covered* in them, burns and cuts and stitches and bullets and even a few that Jemma likes to staunchly pretend do not resemble (distinctly *human*) bite marks. She had scars when she first joined SHIELD, and they've only grown more numerous in the years since.

Case in point.

"Oh, God, it's still way too hot for that," Daisy groans, before she seems to register that it's not just Jemma wanting to be physically affectionate. "What are you…?"

Jemma doesn't say anything in response, just keeps lightly tracing her fingers around the scars on Daisy's stomach.

She's been doing this job for years now. She's been stuck on an alien planet, almost drowned at the bottom of the ocean, gone through a hostile Nazi takeover multiple times, stared traitors and fascists and an ancient god with the face of an evil man and the memories of one she could've loved right in the eye.

And nothing, nothing, *nothing* will ***ever*** terrify her as much as the times she's stood there unable to do anything, entirely helpless as the

people she loves more than anything in the world flatlined right in front of her.

She hasn't gotten close to dying before, at least not in the same ways most of the rest of her team has. But she still remembers so *clearly* what it felt like in the Framework; the stiffness in her body, the dread in her chest, that inexplicable, inescapable feeling that *she should not be here.*

She's still waiting for it to completely go away.

"Do you ever think about it?" She asks, though she doesn't specify what she means.

"…yeah," Daisy says hesitantly, shifting underneath her touch. "I– yeah."

"Will you tell me about it?"

She nods, but doesn't say anything for several minutes. Jemma takes the time to study the scars in the moonlight.

They're deep from how close the gun was, closer to divots than anything else, and the healed skin is twisted and dark. There's a surgical scar right in between them, where the surgeons went in to remove the bullets and attempt to fix the damage. They were unsuccessful, of course, on both counts; Jemma can tell you exactly where the remaining fragments are, just like she can tell you the long lasting effects of point blank gunshots to the lower abdomen.

(They're also *sensitive,* Jemma remembers, smiling faintly when Daisy's breath stutters and stops for a moment when her fingers brush against them. It's something to do with the GH.325, which Jemma would *love* to study, if not for the fact that the last time they *tried* it ended with her and Fitz accidentally getting Daisy off, just through touching the scars alone.)

(In the lab.)

(…at least it was empty?)

"I was more scared than I thought I'd be," Daisy says eventually. "I hadn't ever really been… *scared* before. Not often."

"Before?"

"I had a couple close calls when I was younger. Mostly before my van."

Jemma nods, waiting for the elaboration she doesn't actually expect to arrive. It still frustrates her on occasion, but she's mostly made her peace with Daisy's caginess by n–

"I was in a bad place, back then," Daisy continues, her expression twisting up for a moment, and Jemma nearly shouts in triumph. "I didn't really care what happened to me."

"Like– like when you ran away?" She asks, once she's gotten over her momentary shock. Daisy sighs tiredly.

"Yeah," she murmurs, turning her head and briefly pressing her face against Jemma's thigh. "Like when I ran away."

Jemma hums softly, before hesitantly reaching over and gently running her thumb over a short, vertical scar on Daisy's left wrist. "… were you scared for this?"

It's not very big, a little over four centimeters in length, and slightly darker than a lot of her other scars, like this injury had been deeper. She's noticed it before, has had her suspicions for years, but she's never quite worked up the courage to ask.

Daisy stills for a moment, before inhaling shakily.

"I didn't–" she starts, before pausing. "I didn't think I was. At the time, I mean. I was relieved, mostly. But I look back and I–"

She cuts herself off again, staring up at Jemma with a frown. After a second she exhales slowly, closing her eyes.

"I was *terrified,*" Daisy quietly admits, voice small. "Enough that I haven't tried again. Not like that, at least."

"…but you have in other ways," Jemma infers. Daisy doesn't respond to that, just presses her lips together. There's a look on her face that Jemma's never seen before, one she doesn't particularly want to ever see again.

It's answer enough.

"What about these?" She asks next, just so Daisy will stop looking so devastatingly far away, and runs her index finger over a few smaller scars on her wrist.

They're pale and shiny, with a slightly darker outline that's faintly pinkish in color. About five to eight millimeters in diameter, though some are more ovoid than circular. Most of them are raised, like the majority of her scars are, but a few have dug into her skin, either through past infection or depth of the injury, leaving small, shallow depressions behind. There are a few scattered intermittently across her wrists and forearms, more on her shoulders, and one on the underside of her jawline, right near her left carotid.

This far into her (forced) career as a medical doctor, Jemma is typically pretty good at discerning what causes different types of injuries.

She's never been able to place these ones.

They're obviously burns of some sort, but not the kind that would be the result of a fire, or steam, or chemicals, or any of the other things she can think of that cause burn scars. The only explanation she can think of is that Daisy was *burned with something,* but she can't imagine *what.* Honestly, she's not one hundred percent sure she *wants* to. The thought of it alone is making her feel sick.

"Those're… old," Daisy says slowly, though her relief at the change in subject is evident in her expression. "I was– I was pretty young when that started."

"I'm sure I'll regret asking, but how young?"

She grimaces. "I don't really… remember. Young."

"I'm sorry," Jemma tells her, her face falling. The fact that she can't even *remember–*

"Don't be," Daisy interrupts her train of thought with a wry grin. "That doesn't mean much. There's a lot of stuff I don't remember."

"…that isn't nearly as reassuring as I think you meant it to be."

Daisy shrugs wordlessly in reply. Jemma traces over the scars on her wrist, before dragging her finger up the side of her arm to her shoulder, ending on the singular one near her face. Her Inhuman shivers underneath her, her mouth dropping open.

The air around them hums, and– despite the heat, and the time, and her fatigue, and the weight of everything they've been talking about– Jemma *wants.*

She wants the person she loves to feel safe enough to talk about her pain, she wants Fitz to wake up, she wants it to cool down, she wants more free time, she wants a less demanding job, she wants to make Daisy lose control, she wants to drag her off the bed and make her kneel.

She starts to lean down, because even though it's still way too hot, even with Daisy's help, she finds she cares far less than she did a moment ago.

"Jemma," Daisy breathes, tilting her head so it presses against Jemma's leg, before she sits up to meet her halfway.

It's awkward, and inherently ridiculous; Jemma's back aches, and it can't bend all the way because of the metal rods in her spine, so Daisy is halfway propped up on her elbows, and her nose is bumping against Jemma's chin, but when she pulls back for air Daisy is smiling up at her, and all the pain and discomfort is worth it.

The bed creaks as Daisy sits up and turns around, shuffling closer until she's on her knees, straddling Jemma's lap.

(Fitz snorts and rolls over next to them, and Jemma huffs out an exasperated laugh. She's convinced he would benefit greatly from a C-PAP machine.)

"Can you be quiet?" She asks, and Daisy grins.

"Or we could just wake him up," she says, deliberately holding herself still.

"You know he'd be cranky."

"Yeah, well, maybe I want that."

Jemma scoffs. "No, you don't."

"I can't want you guys to be mean?" Daisy pulls back and asks her, faux affronted. Jemma laughs this time.

"Stop posturing," she says, threading her fingers through Daisy's, while her other hand curls around her hair and tugs lightly. "You only want us to be mean when you're mad at yourself."

Daisy shivers, tilting her head back. "*Jesus.* You gonna give me a diagnosis next?"

"I don't have the credentials for that."

"Which just means you would if you could."

"I can think of a few things," Jemma murmurs, using her grip in her hair to pull her forward. She almost gets what she's aiming for, when–

"Wait, sorry, you actually have diagnoses in mind for me?"

She does. Several. But any thoughts she may or may not have had at any given time are so far from the front of her mind right now, to the point that she's having a difficult time even remembering what they were.

"Daisy," she says, then wets her lips. "Be good for me."

Daisy inhales sharply, her mouth dropping open. She doesn't do anything for several seconds, then drops her head onto Jemma's shoulder with a shaky exhale.

"*Fuck,* Jemma," she whines, her thighs tensing around Jemma's waist for a moment. "Play fair."

Jemma laughs in reply, curling her hand around the back of Daisy's neck, and wanting so badly it feels like everything around her is buzzing with anticipation.

(Wait, no, everything around her is *literally* buzzing.)

("You're going to blow the lightbulbs out again," she warns, and the ringing in her ears abruptly cuts off. Ow.)

"Can I touch you?" Daisy asks as she lifts her head back up, bringing their joined hands up to her face and pressing them against her open mouth. "Please, I'll be so good."

Jemma doesn't respond to that, just moves their hands back down and leans forward.

The average Inhuman body temperature is approximately thirty eight point one degrees Celsius, roughly one degree above the human average. It's negligible in the grand scheme of things, but for a regular person that's the difference between being healthy and having a minor fever, which means that Jemma has a brief moment of worry every time she touches Daisy's skin.

It also means Inhumans run hot. *Hotter,* if the environment is warm,

which theirs absolutely is at the moment.

Daisy's mouth is almost scalding as it slides against hers. She has to pull away after a moment, because she's fairly certain she might burn her tongue if she doesn't.

"Jesus," she says. "Ow."

"Sorry," Daisy replies, not sounding very sorry at all.

She draws back and slides off the bed, using her grip on Jemma to pull her to the edge of the mattress with her, and drops to her knees with a *thud,* muffled in the specific way that means she's dampening the sound waves.

"Please?" She begs, resting her cheek on Jemma's thigh. "I'll be good, I promise."

"I really wish you would use a pillow for this," Jemma admonishes, rather than saying something stupid like *holy fucking hell!* All the blood in her head very rapidly rushes south, leaving her feeling nearly more inarticulate and dumb than she thinks she's ever felt. "You're going to get bruises."

"Don't need one," Daisy mumbles. "I like the way the floor feels."

(*You like hurting yourself,* Jemma thinks, as she brushes Daisy's hair out of her face, and decidedly does not say.)

"Jemma, *please?*"

It comes out quiet, and far closer to a question than it is to anything else, like she's expecting her to deny her request. Daisy stares up at her, her eyes dark and pleading, and really, how is Jemma ever meant to say no to that?

She hums noncommittally, pretending to think it over, even as she gathers Daisy's hair at the base of her skull. Her Inhuman grins and trills happily at the unspoken permission.

Jemma's free hand is still wrapped around Daisy's wrist, her thumb stroking over her radial pulse. After a few moments it sweeps further than it had previously, and brushes over one of the circular scars. She thinks nothing of it, until–

"Cigarettes," Daisy murmurs, her breath fanning against the skin of

Jemma's thigh.

Jemma pauses. She leans back. They stare at each other for a moment, before Daisy blinks and laughs uncomfortably.

"Shit," she says, completely pulling away and running a hand through her hair. Jemma feels cold without her. "That is– *so* not what I meant to say."

"…cig– cigarettes?" Jemma asks incredulously, once it finally clicks. "Those are from cigarettes?"

"C'mon, you're British. Say it the British way."

"You were burned with *cigarettes?*"

"Please, it'll be funny."

Jemma looks at her with what she's sure is a horrified expression on her face. She opens her mouth to say more– demand details, or ask to look closer at them, or maybe just to scream, honestly– when she notices the way Daisy is looking down at the floor, her face pale, her fists clenched on top of her knees. Her lips press together as she swallows back her words.

"…do you want to lie back down?" She asks instead, because she doesn't what else to do; unexpectedly learning about your partner's traumatic childhood isn't exactly conducive to the getting off mood.

"No, I can still–" Daisy starts, jerking her head up, then cuts herself off. She nods after a moment of visible hesitation, and slowly stands up and climbs back onto the bed. Her knees already have the beginning of bruises on them.

"Sorry for killing the mood," she adds, lying down on her back and resolutely staring up at the ceiling. She's smiling, but it's not reaching her eyes. "And to think: I was actually gonna be good for once."

"You're always good," Jemma tells her automatically, and Daisy's face *falls.*

(When Jemma was young, she had a thing about strays. Her parents were constantly trying to get her to stop leaving opened cans of food out for the cats in their neighborhood. She even remembers crying, once, because they wouldn't let her keep the baby bird she had found knocked out of its nest.)

(One summer, when she was finally old enough, she started volunteering at their local shelter, helping take care of the dogs. They would get excited by people just walking by their kennels, barking their heads off, pressing against the fence, wagging their tails so hard their entire back half moved. Most of the them had been adopted by the time she left. Most of them.)

(She never moved from her spot in the corner, ears back, tail lowered, hackles raised. She'd been there the longest, they'd said. Even been taken home a few times, and always brought back in the end. Doesn't fit with what we already have. Growled at me when I touched her. Snapped for no reason. Too skittish for us, too sad, too clingy, too distant, too little, too much.)

(Jemma sat in her kennel on her last day there. She'd never seen her let anyone touch her, but that day she laid her head in Jemma's lap, sighed tiredly, and stared up at her with resignation and grief and wariness and gratitude and exhaustion and love and acceptance and *hurt,* and a million other things she couldn't discern.)

(She tries not to think about why she's remembering it now.)

"*Don't*–" Daisy says, voice wounded, and does not finish her sentence. She blinks up at the ceiling a few times, before pressing her hands over her eyes.

After a few moments she turns onto her side, wordlessly settling back against Fitz, who immediately rolls over and throws an arm over her midsection, even though he's still dead to the world.

"I know, baby," Jemma whispers, scooting closer until Daisy is sandwiched in between them.

She reaches up and hesitantly lays her hand on the side of her neck, resting her thumb against the scar on the underside of her jaw, right by her pulse point. She can feel her heart racing, far faster than it should be.

Her face screws up when she thinks about it, about what had to have happened for the scar to get there. There's no hesitation marks around it, no additional scarring that might indicate a struggle. There's no sign of any attempt at self defense at all.

She'd have to be restrained for it to be like that. Held down.

Jemma exhales shakily as Daisy's hand comes up to cover hers. She

presses against Jemma's thumb with her own, until it starts to dig into her throat. She coughs once, in what sounds a bit like an aborted gag, but she doesn't let up, so Jemma doesn't either. They both know she can take much more than a thumb pressed against her carotid.

The look in her eyes is the last thing Jemma sees before she falls asleep. Later, much later than now, she'll try to describe it.

The only word she'll be able to think of is haunted.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah my sub top Daisy agenda. What about it.

Daisy, in her head: I'll be so good for you ❤
Daisy, out loud, with a thousand yard stare: I got burned with cigarettes when I was a kid.
Jemma: ...I think you got your thought and speech bubbles mixed up.

Jemma has (rather obviously) absolutely gotten close to dying before, many times. Unfortunately, she also has a bad case of "other people had it worse so therefore I'm not allowed to complain about what happened to me." It's terminal :/

The bite marks on Daisy are, of course, my HiveDaisy eucharist/ reciprocal cannibalism agenda. Because what's a Max puppyboy--butch Daisy fic without the horrible awful HiveDaisy of it all.

Source for this chapter: okay there isn't one specific easily identifiable moment for this one, but Daisy does canonically have scars. The headcanon part is her having scars from her childhood. Guys please just trust me here

Chapter 6: she hides things

Chapter Notes

walks in a month late heeeyyyyyy....

Anyways sorry for the delay. Apparently that's what happens when you're "having" an "episode" because you're "schizoaffective"

Am I 100% happy with this chapter? No!!!! But I'm scared if I don't post it now I'd waste away and become a husk of a woman before it got posted.

Chapter specific trigger warnings

-Past child abuse (who's shocked), once again of a religious nature
-Arguing. If there's one thing FitzDaisy are gonna do in their chapters it's argue
-Like. Technically self harm, in the sense that she *is* doing something that hurts her, but she's not doing it specifically to hurt herself
-Daisy's absolutely massive guilt complex

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Have you noticed that Daisy is left handed?"

Fitz momentarily pauses his typing, raising his eyebrows. Normally when Jemma approaches him in the lab, it's to talk about a work matter, or at least have a relevant discussion. She doesn't tend to interrupt him for trivial, out of nowhere topics. Of which her question absolutely is.

"*Hello, Fitz,*" he says in a falsetto, propping his chin on his hand. "*How are you, my genius lab partner whom I love dearly?* Oh, I'm doing great, Jemma, thank you for asking."

She rolls her eyes and tugs on one of his curls ("That won't work on me. I'm not Daisy."), but there's a small grin on her face that betrays her affection.

"Hello, Fitz," she greets. "Have you noticed that Daisy is left handed?"

He thinks about it for a moment; there's probably a good reason why

she's asking, but what hand people happen to prefer isn't exactly high up on the list of things he pays attention to.

"Um… not really."

Jemma nods from where she's standing next to his work station as he starts his typing back up. She lets him work in silence for a couple more minutes, the various lab workers bustling to and fro all around them, before–

"Don't you think that's weird?"

He pauses again, and fully turns to look at her this time. She's staring at his screen with narrowed eyes, but he's pretty sure she's not actually focused on what he's doing.

"Do I think what's weird?"

"That you haven't noticed that she's left handed."

Fitz frowns, leaning back in his desk chair. Jemma presses a hand to his shoulder, rubbing her thumb back and forth. He doesn't think she even realizes she's doing it.

"Again, not really. Sorry, where is this coming from?"

"You haven't noticed she's left handed for almost six years?"

He exhales slowly, trying to disguise his amusement. "It's not exactly something I pay attention to."

"What about me?" She asks.

"You're right handed." Then, when she gets that vindicated look she always gets and goes to say something, "Nine to one odds. Jemma, what is this about?"

Jemma lets go of him and leans against his desk, looking unexpectedly grim given the subject matter.

"Look at her," she tells him, grabbing the back of his chair and spinning it around, so they're both facing towards where Daisy is sitting across the room.

She's over at Jemma's desk, slowly chipping away at some paperwork. Normally she'd be working on a tablet, but there's been an issue with some of them in the past couple of days, so they're temporarily

partially analog.

Fitz squints.

"…Jem, she's very clearly writing with her right hand."

"I know," Jemma says quietly, grabbing his blue light glasses off his face and slipping them into her pocket. "Watch. Daisy."

Daisy pauses her writing and turns to look at them.

(Her hair is still in the braid he helped her with this morning, and Fitz feels himself melt at the sight of it. They've taken to doing that lately, him helping her with her hair; it's good physical therapy for his hands, which still tremor occasionally, and she's had issues with pretty much her entire left arm since she ran away, when she injured it far too severely far too frequently. It's beneficial for both of them, though Fitz would still do it even if it weren't.)

(He'd do a lot of things for her. There's not a lot he *wouldn't.* He hopes she knows that, but knowing Daisy, his hopes aren't particularly high in that regard.)

"–left his glasses in the room," Jemma is saying, and he belatedly realizes he spaced out staring at her. Oops. "Can you go grab them?"

Their Inhuman blinks at them for a second, before turning back down to her paperwork and scanning over it.

"Uh, yeah, I've got a sec. Just pass me the key."

Fitz widens his eyes when Jemma gives him a look. He shrugs at her, trying to convey his bemusement, but she just pulls her lanyard from her pocket and tosses it in Daisy's direction.

She's sitting with her back slightly to them, turned to the right so she can see them over her shoulder. The easiest way to catch the lanyard by far would be for her to reach out with her right hand.

She twists in her chair. Her left hand shoots out and grabs the card out of the air.

Fitz's eyebrows are approaching his hairline as he watches her stand and leave the lab. Once he's sure she's far enough away, he turns to Jemma.

"Okay, you might be onto something."

She looks vindicated again. It's a very specific expression that she (and– *allegedly*– Fitz as well, though you'll never hear him acknowledge it) gets whenever she's proven right, that Daisy once lovingly referred to as *I'm smarter than you and we all know it, so you really should just admit to it already.*

(…there might've been some annoyance in there, too.)

Jemma doesn't bring it up again that day, just gives him a pointed look when Daisy comes back (looking like a kicked puppy, which means she feels guilty for not finding his glasses. Aw, hell, he should probably go stave that off before she starts stewing in it and almost certainly eventually concludes that she deserves to die sad and alone) (again) (seriously, it's practically her immediate go to response to feeling any amount of guilt ever), then goes to chastise some of the lab techs.

His mind drifts from it when Daisy comes over to apologize (the Angel-Fitz on his shoulder is telling him to loudly exclaim that his glasses have miraculously turned up– a veritable miracle, right in the heart of their humble little terrorist organization!) (the Devil-Fitz on the opposite side is cooing over their bereft never-quite-martyr, with her sad eyes and serious tone, like a guard dog who wants nothing more than to give its life protecting its sheep) (the Regular-Fitz in between thinks he might've forgotten to take his meds today, and distantly wonders if poets wouldn't all just benefit from antipsychotics), but still, it's enough that he starts to pay attention where he hadn't before. And while it's not a frequent thing, he definitely notices it over the next several days.

Daisy holds and reaches for things with her left hand; when she goes to take a step, she puts her left foot forward first; she tends to angle herself towards the left. It's all more than indicative of left handedness, but by far, though, the oddest thing he notices is her writing.

It's not just that she writes with her right hand while using her left most of the rest of the time, like she did in the lab, when he first noticed. Whenever he sees her write, her left hand is always *still.* Completely stationary, in a way the rest of her never is.

Daisy is nearly always in motion in some way or another. Her finger will be tapping, or her leg will be bouncing, or she'll be fidgeting with something in her hands. The only times she's *not* is when they're on a mission. And he does mean the *only* times; he can't overstate the

frequency with which she kicks him awake in the middle of the night.

So it's understandable that he finds the entire thing bizarre. He waits about a week before he decides to ask her about it, just to make sure it's not some weird fluke, but by the end of it nothing has changed.

Funnily enough, it happens the next time they're both in the lab at work, though this time it's late (or *early,* rather) enough that they're the only ones in there, at least for the time being.

Fitz exhales as he finally finishes his work for the night, dropping his head back so it hangs over the back of his chair. He scrubs at his face for a moment, before he sits up and leans forward, bracing his hands on his knees. He turns to where Daisy is still working at the desk next to his, more than ready to go home already, but pauses before he says anything to her.

"…why do you do that?" He asks instead, and she hums noncommittally.

"Do what?"

"Write with your right hand."

The pen stops scratching. Her head lifts up slightly.

"Because I'm right handed…?" She says slowly. Fitz frowns.

"No, you're not," he replies, furrowing his brows. "Jemma and I have seen you. Your dexterity is far greater in your left hand, and you automatically prefer it the majority of the time. You're at the very least ambidextrous."

Daisy looks at him quizzically, with a slightly amused expression on her face. "Okay…? Are you gonna bring up which way I part my hair or something next?"

He has to give it to her, the confusion almost seems genuine. He'd absolutely buy it, if it weren't for the way her eyes dart away from his face for a fraction of a second.

"No, I'm being serious," Fitz says. "Jemma brought it up the other day, and I–"

"Jesus, was that what the whole glasses thing was about?" She asks, smiling at him and leaning back in her chair. He's painfully aware of

the steadily growing tension in her shoulders. "I was wondering about that."

"I'm not stupid, Daisy," he admonishes, and she rears back slightly, her eyebrows drawing together. "Stop trying to change the subject."

"…Fitz, I'm right handed," she repeats after a moment of tense silence, all of her previous levity gone. Her hands twitch once, before curling into fists. She glances down at them, then presses them flat against her thighs.

"Why are you being weird about this?" Fitz asks. "So you're ambidextrous, so what?"

"And why are *you* so hung up on it?" She retorts, crossing her arms over her chest. "Okay, so I *might* be ambidextrous– I'm not, by the way– what's the big deal about it?"

"Because it hurts you," he says, and her eyes widen. "I've seen the way you have to take breaks and shake your hand out when you're writing. You've gone out of your way to avoid writing things by hand."

She tilts her head in confusion. "I hurt myself all the time."

"Okay, that doesn't really make me feel any better."

"I'm not joking. I hurt myself all the time," she repeats, furrowing her eyebrows. "What makes this any different?"

Fitz scoffs. "Are you serious?" He asks. "There's a pretty big difference between accidentally hurting yourself and doing it intentionally, especially when it's inconsequential and avoidable."

Daisy stares at him for a moment, baring her teeth in obvious frustration. She doesn't like feeling cornered, he's well aware, but he has absolutely no idea why she *would.* He can't think of any conceivable reason for why she's getting so upset about this.

"This is *stupid,* Daisy," he says, although he's not entirely sure if he's talking about them arguing or the cause. "Why are you doing it?"

"Because *I'm not left handed,* Fitz," she emphasizes, shaking her head. There's a slightly frantic look in her eye, mirrored by how fast her left index finger is tapping against her bicep, before it abruptly stills. "I'm not *bad.*"

Fitz opens his mouth.

Fitz closes his mouth.

Fitz says, "…um," because he's incredibly unsure at how he's meant to respond to that. He clears his throat. "…sorry?"

Daisy's eyes widen for a moment, before she gets a defensive expression on her face.

"What?"

"What do you mean *what?*" He asks, because he genuinely doesn't think he's ever been as confused at something as he is right now. "You just said– in what world do those have *anything* to do with one another?"

She stares at him for a moment, before pinching the bridge of her nose in between her (*left,* he can't help but notice) thumb and index finger, sighing tiredly.

"The *Daisy was raised by crazy nuns* one," she mutters, eyes screwed shut. "We've been over this many times."

"…okay, *again,*" Fitz says slowly. "What do those have to do with one another?"

"Oh, my God, Leo!" Daisy snaps, shoving herself up and away from the desk. "*Why* are you so hung up on this?"

"Maybe because insinuating that there's something wrong with you because you're left handed is grounds for concern?"

She huffs in frustration, harshly dragging her (left again. My God, how did he not notice this years ago?) hand down her face.

"Jesus fucking– I didn't say there's anything *wrong* with me."

"No, you just said you're not left handed, because you're not bad. The implication being that you would be if you *were.*"

Daisy stares at him for a moment. She glances around the empty lab, before dropping her head into her hands with a groan.

"I didn't say–" she starts, pressing the heels of her palms against her eye sockets. "There's nothing wrong with it. Obviously. It's not– *bad.* But *I'm*–"

She doesn't say anything after that, just chews on her lip and rocks back and forth on her heels, rubbing at her eyes until Fitz is sure she's seeing patterns. He waits until he's sure she's not going to continue, then takes a step in her direction.

"Daisy," he says, reaching out and gently grabbing her wrists. "Do you think you're… bad?"

Daisy scoffs as he pulls her hands away from her face. Her eyes are slightly red and swollen from how hard she was rubbing them.

"Kinda one of my defining traits, remember?" She says, eyebrows raised. "The whole guilt complex thing? You've known that for years."

"No, I don't mean in general. Do you think you're bad for *this?*"

He knows he's hit the nail on the head when her entire face crumples. She exhales slowly, looking up at the ceiling and blinking rapidly.

"I know it's–" she tries, before grimacing. "It's fucking archaic. I don't think it's really a thing anymore. But most– most of the nuns were old."

Fitz blinks, his heart sinking.

"Are you saying–"

"Yes."

"They–"

"*Yes,* Leo," she interrupts wearily. "Whatever it is you're thinking, the answer is probably yes."

"*Jesus.*"

"That was their justification, yeah."

"They're wrong, you know?" He tells her, ignoring her attempt at deflection. "That's not something you can control, and it certainly has no bearing on your character. You're *good,* Daisy, and anyone who can't see that is either blind or stupid."

Daisy sighs quietly, shuffling closer and dropping her head onto his shoulder. His arms wrap around her torso, and he kisses the side of her head.

"…say it again," she mumbles into his shoulder, fingers curling around the fabric of his shirt, and Fitz softens.

"You're good," he repeats, taking her left hand in his right and bringing it up to his face. Her fingers twitch when he presses his lips to her palm. "You're so good, Daisy, all the time."

Daisy breathes in sharply, before letting out a shaky exhale, and turns her head so her temple is pressed against his shoulder instead of her forehead. He can feel her eyes on his face.

As close as it is, he's noticing details on her hand he doesn't think he ever has before. Namely the thin, short scars on a few of her knuckles, like she'd either repeatedly hit or been hit with something.

"Is that…?" He tentatively asks, and she nods after a moment.

"That, and a few other methods," she says, fingers slowly curling into a loose fist in his grasp. Her ring finger sticks out at a slight angle, the way it always does when she tries to bend it.

"Is that why you keep it so still when you're writing?"

"Huh?"

"When you write, your left hand stays perfectly still."

"Oh." Daisy grimaces. "Uh– no. They'd tape it down."

Jesus *Christ.* He keeps thinking he's figured out the worst of it, then she always goes and says something uniquely devastating.

"I'm not ambidextrous," she adds, and sniffs once. His shoulder is starting to get wet. "Or I'm not naturally ambidextrous, I guess. I just got good at it."

Fitz knows what that means all too well. When you never know what inconsequential thing will set them off next, you get good at a lot of things. Quickly.

He's good at things he can't talk about, because the second he does everyone will know. Because the things they're good at are the things nobody should have to be.

He's good at being quiet. He's good at staying out of the way, and deferring to nearly invisible cues that no one else notices. At not eating too annoyingly, because it's never rational, because why would

it be? He's good at not looking at ma for help while he's yelling, or being too happy when he doesn't deserve to be, or smiling at the wrong time, or even drawing too loudly, once, when he was four.

"I know," he says. He slides his free hand up her back, feeling the raised skin underneath the fabric of her shirt, and cradles the back of her head. "You got good at a lot of things. I know."

Daisy sniffs again, and nods into his neck. It's confirmation of what he already knew, has known for years, but still. The pit in his stomach widens anyway.

Her eyes are red when she pulls back, but her face is dry. His shoulder pointedly isn't. He wonders how long ago she got good at that.

"I love you," he tells her, because he does. Wholly, unquestionably, indisputably.

She doesn't say it back. Or can't, maybe. She never says it to anyone, not anymore. Not after how many people have used it to hurt her, even the ones that didn't mean to.

When she closes her eyes, leans forward, presses her forehead against his, he knows she means it all the same.

Chapter End Notes

Daisy any time she feels any amount of guilt ever: *through gritted teeth* **They need to put me down like a sick dog.**

Some poor night shift worker in the lab tech group chat: Dr. Fitz is canoodling with Agent Johnson in the lab again I don't think they know I'm here.
Upvoted reply: Damn I had $20 on it being Dr. Simmons this time.

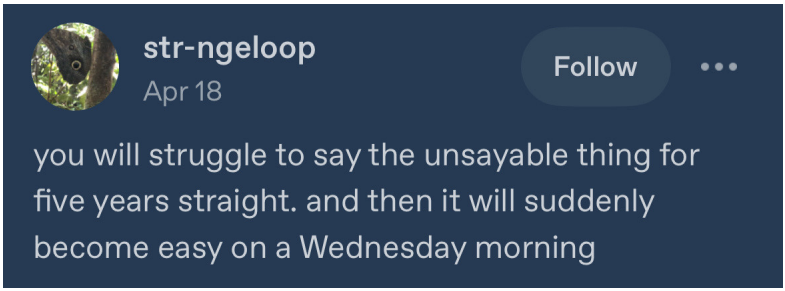
Fitz very intentionally never thinks of Daisy as "his" Inhuman in the same way Jemma thinks of Daisy as "hers," solely because I think if post Framework Fitz thought of any Inhuman as "belonging" to him and him alone he'd start throwing up. She is *their* Inhuman though :-)

(See my tumblr post about Daisy being theirs and them being each others but neither of them being Daisy's.)

Source for this chapter: none! While left handed abuse is a real thing (particularly in religious environments), Daisy being left handed is entirely headcanon. Oh I feel nauseous.

Chapter 7: +1

Chapter Notes


str-ngeloop
Apr 18
Follow
you will struggle to say the unsayable thing for five years straight. and then it will suddenly become easy on a Wednesday morning

And it's a wrap! It only took me like two extra months. Starts pantomiming choking myself out.

I'm not 100% happy with this chapter (partially because it's almost entirely headcanon, which for some reason I really hate writing), but once again I just had to get it out before I withered away into a husk. Ough.

Chapter specific trigger warnings

-Discussion about past child abused, including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse
-A conversation is had about the traumatizing death of a dog, witnessed by a child
-I think that's it actually

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's been a long day.

Long week actually, part of a long month, which is part of a long year, following several even longer ones. Their latest crisis, *finally* officially over and done with as of a few hours ago, had been some jackass with far too much influence who let power get to their head, and decided to make it SHIELD's problem. It's been all hands on deck for a bit now.

So a day ending in the letter y.

At least the world wasn't ending this time. Small victories, right?

Fitz and Jemma are both exhausted when they finally stumble in through the front door. None of them have been home in several days,

and it's been even longer since all three of them have slept in the same place. For weeks now, at least one of them has been working around the clock. They're both looking forward to nothing but collapsing into *their* bed.

Daisy is already there by the time they get back. She'd been sent home ahead of them, after Coulson– who eventually just gave up and exhaustedly told everyone that they could finish dealing with damage control tomorrow, now that all the immediate threats are over– caught her dozing off while she was still standing up. Both of them assumed she'd already be fast asleep by the time they got in.

She is decidedly not fast asleep.

Instead, she's sitting at the kitchen table, hunched over a small box that neither of them have seen before, and searching through it in an attempt to find something.

"Should we ask?" Jemma says, weary amusement clear in her voice. Daisy looks up at them for a second, before going back to– *whatever* it is she's doing.

"I remembered a project I was working on when I was younger, that I never finished," she tells them, not paying much attention as they start to settle in. "The USB it's on is somewhere in this box, but I haven't found it yet."

"Do you want help?" Fitz asks, once he's put his shoes away. Daisy shrugs.

"You can if you want. Company would be nice."

There's more details he notices as he gets closer to the table, like the several polaroids laying right by the box. He picks one up and looks at it.

It's a picture of a little girl, maybe six or seven years old, standing in front of a staircase and smiling at the camera, with slightly pointed ears and dark hair in two braids and teeth that are barely visible through her small grin. Fitz stares at it uncomprehendingly for a minute; he looks up at Daisy, then back down at the picture, then back up at her again.

It clicks all at once.

"Wait, is this a picture of ***you?***" He exclaims, entirely too loudly.

Jemma's head whips around from where she is in the kitchen, and Daisy hunches her shoulders, her eyes darting away.

"Um… yes?" She says slowly. "Sister McKenna had a camera."

Fitz looks at the box again, only to see that it's filled almost entirely with polaroids. The one he's holding is suddenly yanked out of his hands, and he turns to see Jemma staring at it intensely.

"Oh, my *God,*" she says, sounding like she's struggling to not start squealing. "*Daisy*–"

The Inhuman in question groans into her hand and slides down in her chair. "*Okay,* we don't need to make a big deal about it."

"We do, actually," Fitz tells her with a grin, as he hears the click of Jemma's phone camera behind him. His phone buzzes in his pocket a few seconds later, and he knows that she's just sent it to him, if not to the entire team. "We really do."

Jemma hands it back to him after that, and he stares down at the picture.

He had some idea, of course, of what Daisy had to have looked like as a kid, in the blurry, nondescript *I know you now so I can picture you then* sort of way. He never imagined he'd actually get to *see* her. Her hair is different than he imagined it would be, her limbs longer, her eyes narrower, but it's still so recognizably *Daisy*.

Fitz swallows, gently holding the photo in his hands. His eyes sting for some reason.

"Were you…" he starts hesitantly, very conscious of the fact that this is more than she's *ever* shared about her childhood before. "Were you *Skye* yet? In this?"

"No, not 'til I was ten," Daisy says distractedly, back to rifling through the box. "Probably still Mary Sue in most of these. And I'm not telling you my last name, so don't even ask."

It'd be less jarring if she punched him in the chest, he thinks. Fitz's breath catches for a brief second, and his eyes momentarily go from stinging to damp, before he clears his throat and blinks it away. Forget never seeing her: he never, not in a million years, thought he'd *hear* anything.

She's watching them intently when he glances over at her, eyes serious, brows furrowed, even as her face is still tilted down towards the box.

Not distracted, then. Very much not distracted.

"Mary Sue," Fitz tries out, then attempts to hide his grimace. "That's, uh…"

Daisy snorts. "You don't have to be nice. It sucks. I preferred Mary."

Jemma makes a quiet noise of realization behind him.

"Oh, *that's* what you–" she says. "I was wondering."

Daisy gives her a confused look over Fitz's shoulder, but he's not paying attention to the interaction. He's looking down at one of the pictures on the table, of a baby sleeping with its back to the camera, and trying not to start crying.

"…Daisy," he says. She glances up at him, then sighs and drops her head into her hands when she sees what picture he's looking at.

"Oh, my God."

"*Daisy.*"

"C'mon, man–"

"You were so *round,*" he warbles, pressing a hand over his mouth and gingerly picking up the polaroid. Jemma comes up behind him and lets out a single bark of laughter. "You're like a little circle."

Daisy lunges across the table, snatching the photo out of his hands and shoving it into her pocket.

"*Okay,*" she says through gritted teeth, her face red. "It's just a baby picture, don't be weird. I didn't act like this about yours."

You also weren't expecting to never be able to see them, he thinks, and pointedly does not say. That doesn't mean much, though; they all know what's being left unspoken.

"What about this one?" Jemma asks, picking one of the polaroids up off the table.

When Fitz looks at it, he sees that it's a photo of a young Daisy,

grinning at the camera with a medium sized dog in her arms, its wagging tail a blur. She can't be older than ten or eleven in it.

"Oh, that's Dog!" Daisy says, lighting up at the sight of the picture. Fitz laughs.

"You named your dog *Dog*?" He asks incredulously, but she shakes her head.

"No, he didn't have a name," she tells them, taking the picture from Jemma. "And he wasn't mine. I didn't want to give him a name unless I was sure he would like it too, so I just called him Dog. It's stupid, but I was also nine."

Fitz takes the polaroid when it's offered to him. He can see the details more clearly now; her slightly too big, borderline threadbare clothes, the way her smile is missing several teeth, the bloody bandaids on her knees, the bruises on her arms that just barely peek out from underneath her sleeves.

"He was one of the strays that lived in an alley near the orphanage," Daisy continues. "The nuns kept calling animal control to get rid of them, but he would always end up coming back, even when the others wouldn't."

Her smile dims then, the photo drooping slightly as she absentmindedly lowers her arm.

"He stopped showing up one day," she says. "I like to think someone found him and adopted him, but that's…"

If you asked either Fitz or Jemma, they'd both be hard pressed to name many people who can lie better than Daisy can. Still, they've known her for years by now, and while it's not one hundred percent foolproof, they are aware of some of her tells.

As it is, the small divot near the corner of her mouth where she's biting down on the inside of her lip is enough to let them know she's not being entirely truthful about the dog.

Jemma circles the table to stand over Daisy's shoulder under the guise of looking at more pictures, before she reaches out and presses her thumb to Daisy's lip until she releases her jaw.

"Sorry," she mumbles, still staring down at the photo with furrowed eyebrows. "He, uh– he got hit by a car. I dunno why I lied."

Daisy exhales shakily and leans back in her chair. She rests her head against Jemma's stomach, who reaches up to cradle it.

"There was a lot of blood," she continues quietly, setting the polaroid down and fidgeting with her fingers. "And I didn't– I didn't do anything."

Jemma lightly tugs her hair at that. Daisy shivers, before huffing out a slightly sardonic laugh.

"I– *couldn't* do anything," she amends after a moment. "There was nothing I could've done. It wasn't my fault."

"Good job," Jemma murmurs, as Fitz reaches out and strokes the knuckles against the side of Daisy's face. She leans into it.

"Do you want to talk about it?" He asks, and Jemma can practically feel her grimace.

"Not particularly," she tells them, then turns her head away. "He, um– he made a– a sound. And I– I still– *hear* it. Sometimes. When Trip–"

She cuts herself off. Jemma waits for a moment, thinking she'll finish her sentence, but she never does.

She's staring out the living room window when Jemma leans over to see her face, worrying her bottom lip in between her teeth. After a few seconds she blinks, her eyes clearing, and inhales deeply.

"I always thought it was a little bit funny," Daisy says, then grimaces. "Christ, not– I meant the way he kept coming back to the orphanage no matter how many times the nuns tried to get rid of him, and how *I* was his favorite. In an Alanis Morissette *Ironic* type of way."

"Nothing in that song is actually ironic," Jemma corrects, and Daisy tilts her head back to give her an unimpressed look. "I get what you mean, though."

Fitz was the first person she ever connected with outside of her parents, after all. There are parts she'll obviously never understand, but Jemma gets– better than many people, she would imagine– just how isolating being *other* can be. Her only company was the stars; she can only imagine what she would've done if she had an animal as easily accessible as Daisy's dog was at that age.

And even besides the metaphor of it all, Kree are descended from

something close to canines; it's amazing they turned out as humanoid as they did, all things considered. DNA is passed on through generations, including generations of alien/human hybrids that are the result of genetic experimentation. And yes, five thousand years of separation tends to dilute the genetic pool, but Daisy's mother was *old.*

Which is to say, of course, that Daisy is perhaps one of the most distinctly *non* human Inhumans Jemma has met, both appearance- and (occasionally) behavior-wise. Of course it's a little bit funny that her childhood dog directly paralleled her life back then.

Jemma stifles a smile against the top of her Inhuman's head as she thinks about it. The picture is laying on the table in front of them, and she's acutely aware of the matching fangs, the way both Skye and the dog's eyes are reflecting the flash of the camera.

"How old are you in this one?" Fitz asks, changing the subject. Daisy takes the photo from his hands to check.

"Thirteen," she says after a few seconds, before squinting at the picture. "Maybe fourteen? I don't know."

"You don't know?"

Daisy laughs and hands the polaroid up to Jemma.

"My teenage years are a bit blurry."

Jemma– pointedly ignoring *that* concerning statement– looks at the picture. It's of a teenage Skye in what looks like a nursery, surrounded by little kids. There's a young boy of about three wrapped around her left leg, which she's raising up to lift him into the air, and a sleeping baby cradled in her arms. Everyone is smiling in this one, even Skye.

There are bruises on her face. There are bruises in a lot of the photos. None of them have acknowledged it yet.

"This is at the orphanage?" Jemma asks, and Daisy hums in the affirmative.

"I helped out with the younger kids a lot," she says, grinning to herself. "It eventually reached a point where I was usually the oldest at all my placements, and I felt responsible. Better me than the kids, right?"

She laughs slightly as she says it, but Jemma can see the tension in

her shoulders.

"You were a kid, too," she murmurs, reaching around and brushing Daisy's hair out of her face.

Daisy inhales sharply, before her head dips in acknowledgement.

"Yeah," she says quietly. "I know."

She shifts in her chair and clears her throat, her eyes darting to the front door for a moment. Jemma wordlessly tightens her grip on her shoulder in response, and Daisy huffs out a quiet laugh, reaching up and hooking her index finger around Jemma's.

"I know," she repeats, slightly louder this time, "Jesus, I know that. The distance… helps."

And hell, if that isn't true. Daisy may be particularly adept at it, but it's not as if Jemma is completely unfamiliar with the concept of emotional repression. She *still* hasn't acknowledged why she gets so panicked when she's sick, even all these years later. When she thinks back to it, to multiple *its,* really, she can only remember watching as it happens to some other woman, one who has nothing to do with her. The distance *helps.*

Daisy clears her throat awkwardly, before shoving the next photo in Fitz's direction, not looking at either of them as she does it.

It's of a somewhat large group of kids sitting on the front steps of a building, presumably the orphanage. Several of them are grinning at the camera, but even more aren't even looking at it at all, too busy interacting with each other to notice their picture being taken.

Skye isn't smiling in this one.

It's the first thing Fitz notices. He can't even see the bottom half of her face; it's hidden behind her knees, along with most of her body. She's the only kid sitting alone, off to the side, and she's not looking at the camera either. She's staring off at something out of frame, with a far away look in her eyes.

"That's when I stopped talking."

Fitz lifts his head. Daisy glances at him for a second, before looking back down at the photos on the table, fiddling with one in her hands.

"After the Andersons, I mean. I was almost twelve when I got taken back to the orphanage."

"Not sent back?" Jemma asks, and Daisy's lips twitch into a brief sardonic grin.

"Nope. Intervention became necessary before that could happen."

"…you stopped talking?" Fitz questions, not liking how she phrases being sent back to the orphanage like it was an inevitability. He likes what she said before that even less.

Daisy nods jerkily. She offers him what he thinks is meant to be a reassuring smile, but it just comes across like a grimace.

"For a while. The Andersons thought–" she starts, before pausing and pressing her lips together. "They said I talked too much. A lot of people did, but I didn't– *listen.* To them. So they made sure I–"

She stops again, looking faintly nauseous, and Fitz can tell she's not going to finish that sentence. It's fine, he gets enough of the gist to be appropriately horrified.

"How long is a while?" Jemma hedges. He isn't sure he wants her to answer.

"Few years," she tells them, and Fitz shares an anguished look with Jemma, whose face has fallen. "I was fourteen, I think. Didn't really get fully better until I ran away, though. I had a stutter for a little bit."

"What–" he starts, "what did they *do* to…"

He trails off when Daisy shakes her head, eyes fixed on the table.

"…enough," she says, and Fitz decides that's all he's prepared to hear.

It's silent for a few moments after that, and he looks down at the pictures on the table in front of him to distract himself from the last one.

"You're… *alone* in a lot of these," he says eventually, staring down at several other candid group photos of some of the kids at the orphanage, probably all around two to five years old. She's by herself in all of them, rarely even smiling.

Daisy winces, nodding a few times. "Ah, yeah. I had an attachment disorder when I was little."

"…sorry?"

"That's the one where babies aren't held enough. Wanna feel the back of my head?"

"Uh… *no,* I'm good," he says, though he can tell Jemma is doing just that.

"Do you know if you ever wore a cranial orthotic helmet?" She asks, her tone of voice making it very clear that she's getting sidetracked. Daisy laughs.

"Jemma, there's a reason it's flat. I wasn't exactly receiving specialized medical attention."

"Attachment disorder," Fitz echoes, and they both turn to look at him. "So you didn't– Daisy, did you have *friends?*"

Daisy looks at him quizzically. "Like… in general?" She asks, and he nods. "There were people I was friendly with when I was on the streets, I guess. And the Rising Tide, although other than Miles they were mostly more like colleagues."

"And when you were a kid?"

"Lee, I moved every couple of months," she tells him, smiling exasperatedly. "When I *was* somewhere long enough to know people, I was always the weird computer nerd who was constantly getting into trouble and– after a certain point– didn't talk. I had braces and would skip class to sit under the bleachers and read Warrior Cats. People weren't exactly lining up to be friends with me, man. I think you both think I was way cooler than I actually was."

"You're cool," Fitz defends. "You're one of the coolest people I've met."

Daisy smiles again, more genuine this time. "Thanks. I wasn't always."

He finds that slightly hard to imagine, but then again, he's biased. It's the same way he can't imagine Jemma as anything other than a genius, or May as anything other than strong, or Mack as anything other than charming.

He continues to think about it as he shuffles through the box, past more baby photos and school pictures (and what briefly looks like a mugshot, that Daisy very quickly snatches). It's a few moments before he finds one that catches his eye, but he pulls it out and offers it to her

when one does.

"What about this one?"

She's a teenager in this one too, around fifteen or so, and standing with a pair of adults he assumes are her foster parents. They're a younger couple, maybe a bit younger than middle aged, and both of them have an arm around her shoulders. All three of them are smiling, though hers is small, like she's slightly unsure of how to feel, but knows she's supposed to smile anyway.

She's looking at the camera. They're looking at her.

Daisy's face immediately pales several shades when she turns her head to look at the photo, her eyes widening, her shoulders tensing up. Her mouth drops open for a moment, before it abruptly snaps back shut with a *click*. Fitz begins to suspect that he shouldn't have chosen this one.

"That's–" she starts, then stops and presses her hands over her eyes. She has to try several times before words start coming out again. "That's the, um– that's the Martins."

Her voice cracks on the name. Fitz slowly lowers his arm, dread tightening his chest.

"They were my last placement," she continues with a shaky inhale. "I ran away– *after*. Eventually. I didn't realize that picture was in here."

Her hands are still over her face. *So she can't see the picture,* he realizes, epiphany accompanied by a bolt of nausea. He drops the picture onto the table, then turns it face down. A beat passes as he stares at the back of the film, before he grabs it again and crumples it in his fist, then shoves it in his pocket to throw away later.

"My door locked from the outside. I had to go out the window," Daisy says, with a slightly hysterical laugh. She rubs her eyes for a moment, before dropping her hands and staring down at the wood grain on the tabletop. "They, um– they weren't… mean. About it."

Jemma inhales sharply at that, in an obvious realization that he's not privy to. He turns to look at her, only to see her face screwed up in the way that means she feels nauseous.

"I was saf– fine in the rest of the house," Daisy adds, before shifting uncomfortably in her chair. "Which is– funny. It was usually the other

way around."

She presses her lips together and looks away, fidgeting with her fingers, and Fitz leans forward and takes her hands in his when she starts picking at her cuticles; that's always a sure sign she's about to start biting them, and he'd really rather not clean blood off the table right now.

"What was the other way around?" He asks. Jemma winces and hesitantly shakes her head at him from behind Daisy, but she just blinks at him, and pulls the rug out from underneath his feet.

"They couldn't hurt me if I made it to my room," she says, voice flat, eyes dull. "Just delayed it, really, but it still gave me some time."

He isn't quite sure how to describe the noise he makes, when she finally, finally, *finally* says it out loud, after years and years of keeping it hidden. The quiet part, the unspoken thing, the secret everyone knew but no one ever shared.

They couldn't hurt me if I made it to my room, she said.

Meaning, *they would hurt me when I* ***didn't.***

Fitz is up and out of his chair before he realizes he's moving, crossing to the other side of the table in a single stride. She doesn't move for a moment when he pulls her against her torso, just like she didn't a few months ago.

"Sorry if that's… too much," Daisy says slowly, leaning her head against his chest. "I've never really… Miles was the only person I ever really told–" (she mumbles something here, but Fitz can't make anything besides a *w* out) "–and that's only 'cause it was so recent. He didn't like hearing about it."

"Is that why you don't talk about anything?" Fitz asks, feeling all the pieces start to click together in his brain.

"No," she says. "Yes? I don't know. Maybe."

Daisy exhales slowly and pulls away, looking up at him with a tired smile.

"Miles was a loser," she adds. "I doubt he had that big of an impact on my psyche."

She goes to say more, but cuts herself off by a yawn, her jaw cracking with the force of it.

"Why don't we turn in for the night?" Fitz suggests, exhaustion evident in his voice.

Their Inhuman hums in agreement, before pushing her chair back from the table. She stands and stretches with another yawn, and it's as if the sight of her fatigue reminds Jemma of her own. The weight of the past several weeks slams into her all at once, and she has to blink several times to keep herself from falling asleep right then and there.

The three of them (plus the dog) all shamble through their nighttime routines, though Jemma is exhausted enough that she'd be hard pressed to recount any details. By the time they all collapse onto their bed, she's struggling to even keep her eyes open.

Daisy is fidgeting with something next to her, and when Jemma looks closer, she sees that it's a USB stick. She laughs, and so does Fitz when he glances down to see what she's reacting to.

"How long have you had that?" He asks.

"Long enough," Daisy says cryptically, with a slight smile.

"You sound like May," Jemma cuts in, and Fitz groans, nodding emphatically in agreement. "I think you've spent so much time together you're slowly morphing into her."

"Does that make you and me Couls–" Fitz starts, before being cut off by a pillow slamming into his face.

"Oh, my God, please don't put that image in my head," Daisy says, eyes wide. "I do *not* want to think about May and Coulson doing anything we've done. I think I'm gonna be sick."

"I'm just saying," Fitz tells her with a grin, rolling over onto his side to face her. "Just based on how they interact– Jemma, back me up here."

"Sorry, Daisy," she says, not apologetic at all. She sits up behind him. "Fitz and I have had a bet going for years now, actually, on the exact nature of their relationship."

"La la la, I can't hear you!" Daisy shouts, hands now over her ears. She only removes them when Jemma and Fitz are both too busy laughing to make any further comments.

They all settle in after that, and it gets quiet for a while. Long enough that she's sure Daisy and Fitz have both fallen asleep. Jemma isn't, though, too busy thinking.

"Why now?" She eventually asks, and Daisy shifts next to her. Not asleep, then.

"Why what?"

"Why talk about it now, after all these years of… *not?* What changed?"

Their Inhuman blinks up at the ceiling in slight surprise, before shrugging and looking away.

"I dunno," she says. "I couldn't– and I mean, like, *couldn't*– talk about for so long. I wanted to. Parts of it, at least." She laughs. "Hell, I even *tried.* I let you guys see so much stuff I normally wouldn't let anyone."

Daisy sits up then, her eyebrows furrowed. Jemma props herself up so she can see her face.

"I don't know," she repeats. "I don't think there's any one specific reason. I think it's just… years and years of everything piling up, 'til it was all there was. Until I was– *choking.* On all of it."

She look down at her hands laying in her lap for several moments, and Jemma and Fitz both watch her in silence, waiting for her to sort her thoughts. After a minute she looks back up, and offers them a hesitant smile.

"I don't want to choke anymore," Daisy tells them. "I think I'm ready to finally *breathe.*"

Chapter End Notes

Jemma did in fact send that picture to the whole team by the way. Coulson cried a little bit. May will vehemently deny this but it's her phone background.

Also, her realizing that Daisy was sexually abused (see my analysis post about Daisy and sexual violence) while Fitz didn't was very much intentional, simply because there are things that women will very easily pick up on that (by and large) most (especially cis, which Fitz is (in this AU)) men will not. He'd get

there eventually, but I think it makes sense that a woman would put the pieces together much quicker than a man would, even if she doesn't necessarily have personal experience with it.

(It's also intentionally from Fitz's POV, because while I'm very good at writing the implication, I'm very not at writing the explicit confirmation. #myshame)

And, of course, the w thing that Daisy mumbles near the end is that she told Ward about her childhood □↕□

Okay enough domesticity. Back to writing my novel length Daisy torture fic.

End Notes

Fic title from Just Stay by The Front Bottoms, which is a Daisy song of all time actually. Olivia Wilde nodding dot gif.

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